

by Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh



in the tavern of ruin

SEVEN ESSAYS ON
sufism

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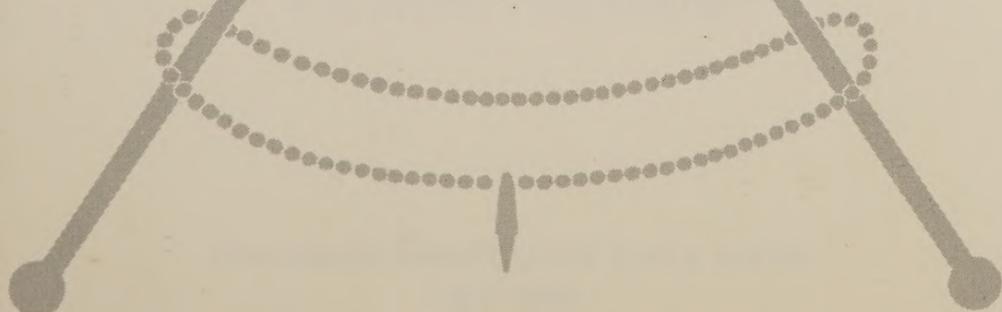
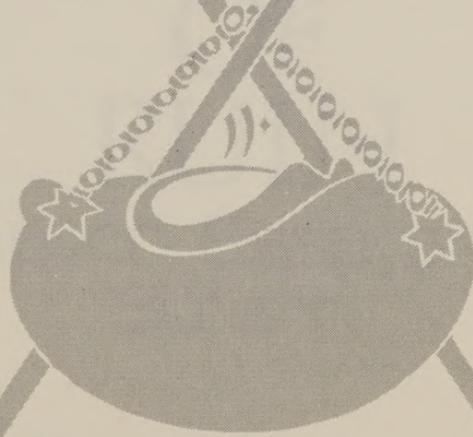
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Seven Essays On
Sufism



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Seven Essays On
Sufism

Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh

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تصوف

SUFISM

From a speech delivered
at the Sorbonne,
1963

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INTRODUCTION

The substance and definition of Sufism: the substance of Sufism is the Truth and the definition of Sufism is the selfless experiencing and actualization of the Truth.

The practice of Sufism: the practice of Sufism is the intention to go towards the Truth, by means of love and devotion. This is called the *Tariqat*, the Spiritual Path or way towards God.

The definition of the sufi: the sufi is one who is a lover of Truth, who by means of love and devotion moves towards the Truth, towards the Perfection which all are truly seeking. As necessitated by Love's jealousy, the sufi is taken away from all except the Truth-Reality. For this reason, in Sufism it is said that, "Those who are inclined towards the hereafter can not pay attention to the material world. Likewise, those who are involved in the material world can not concern themselves with the hereafter. But the sufi (because of Love's jealousy) is unable to attend to either of these worlds."

Concerning this same idea, Shebli has said, "One who dies for the love of the material world, dies a hypocrite. One who dies for the love of the hereafter, dies an ascetic. But one who dies for the love of the Truth, dies a sufi."

Sufism is a school for the actualization of divine ethics. It involves an enlightened inner being, not intellectual proof; revelation and witnessing, not logic. By divine ethics, we are referring to ethics which transcend mere social convention; a way of being which is the actualization of the attributes of God.

To explain the Truth is indeed a difficult task. Words, being limited, can never really express the Perfection of the Absolute, the Unbound. Thus, for those who are imperfect, words create doubt and misunderstanding. Yet:

*If one cannot drink up the entire ocean,
one can drink to one's limit.*

Philosophers have written volumes and spoken endlessly of the Truth, but somehow their efforts have always fallen short. For the sufi, philosophers are those who view the Perfection of the Absolute from a limited perspective; so all they see is part of the Absolute, not the Infinite in its entirety. It is indeed true that what philosophers see is correct; nevertheless, it is only a part of the whole.

One is reminded of Rumi's well-known story of a group of men in India who had never seen an elephant. One day they came to a place where an elephant was. In complete darkness they approached the animal, each man feeling it. Afterwards, they described what they thought they had perceived. Of course their descriptions were different. He who had felt a leg, imagined the elephant to be a pillar. The man who felt the animal's ear, described the elephant as a fan, and so on. Each one of their descriptions with respect to the various parts they had experienced was true. However, as far as accurately describing the whole, their conceptions had all fallen short. If they had had a candle, the difference of opinions would not have come about. The candle's light would have revealed the elephant as a whole.

Only by the light of the Spiritual Path and the mystic way can the Truth really be actualized. In order for one to truly witness the Perfection of the Absolute, one must see with one's inner being, which perceives the whole of Reality. This witnessing happens when one becomes perfect, losing one's (partial) existence in the Whole.

4 If the Whole is likened to the Ocean, and the part to a drop, the sufi says that witnessing the Ocean with the eye of a drop is impossible. However, when the drop becomes one with the Ocean, it sees the Ocean with the eye of the Ocean.

HOW IS IT POSSIBLE TO REALIZE PERFECTION?

Man is dominated by his self's desires and fears. Those who are ensnared in these habitual impulses are out of harmony with the Divine Nature, and thus ill. As a result of this illness, feelings become disturbed and accordingly, thoughts and perceptions become unsound. Thus, one's faith as well as one's knowledge of the Truth strays from what is real.

In order to follow the way to Perfection, one must first rectify these incorrect thought processes and transmute one's desires and fears. This is accomplished by coming into harmony with the Divine Nature. This way of harmony (the Spiritual Path) consists of spiritual poverty, devotion, and the continuous, selfless remembrance of God. In this way, one comes to perceive the Truth as it really is.

ASCETICISM AND ABSTINENCE IN SUFISM

In order to travel the path, the sufi needs strength supplied by proper bodily nourishment. It has been said that whatever the sufi eats is transformed into spiritual qualities and light. However, the food of others, since it but serves their own desires and fears, only strengthens their selfish attachments and takes them further away from the Truth.

*This one eats and only
stinginess and envy result.*

*While that one eats and there is but
the light of the One.*

*This one eats and only
impurity comes about.*

*While that one eats and all becomes
the Light of God.*

It is clear then, that Sufism is not based upon ascetic practices such as abstinence from food. In our school, the traveller on God's Way is only instructed to abstain from food when he is sick or entangled in excessive desire or fear. In this case, the Master or Spiritual Guide permits one to refrain from eating for a brief period of time, and instead directs one to concentrate on spiritual practices. In this way, the excess is transmuted and the seeker's inner being becomes harmonious. Then, the dervish will be enabled to continue on the dangerous ascent to the Infinite.

Some have thought that by fasting the strength necessary for purification is attained. On the contrary, in Sufism abstinence alone is not enough to purify the self. It is true that asceticism and abstinence give one a certain spiritual state, and in this state one's perception may be clarified. But if the self is likened to a dragon that by fasting becomes powerless, it is certain that when the fast is broken and enough food is eaten, the dragon will revive, and stronger than ever will go about attempting to fulfill its desires.

In Sufism, it is by the *Tariqat* (Spiritual Path) that the self is gradually purified and transformed into Divine Attributes, until there is nothing left of one's compulsive self. Then all that remains is the Perfect, Divine Self. In such extensive and precise work, asceticism and abstinence are virtually worthless.

THE SPIRITUAL PATH

The *Tariqat* is the way by which the sufi comes into harmony with the Divine Nature. As we have said, this way is comprised of spiritual poverty (*faqr*), devotion and the continuous, selfless remembrance of God, which are represented by the cloak of the dervish (*kherqeh*).

1. Spiritual Poverty (*faqr*)

This is both the feeling of being imperfect and needy, and the desire for perfection. The Prophet, Mohammed, said, "My honor is from spiritual poverty. I have been honored over and above all prophets by being graced with spiritual poverty." And God revealed to the Prophet, "Say, God increase my true knowledge of you." As this saying indicates, even though Mohammed was given the honor of

6 Prophethood, it was still necessary that he feel his poverty and desire to be nearer to the essence of God.

2. The cloak of the dervish (*kherqeh*).

The *kherqeh* is the garment of honor of the dervish. It symbolizes the Divine Nature and Attributes. Some people have mistakenly imagined that the cloak actually possesses these properties and have felt that if one was to wear such a cloak, one would become a saint. However, wearing spiritual clothing does not make one spiritual.

A sufi wears what he or she likes while being in harmony with what is socially approved. 'Ali said, "Wear those clothes which neither cause you to be looked down upon, nor admired and envied." Thus, it is not the clothes which make the sufi, rather it is his or her actions and inner being.

*Recline on the throne of the heart, and
with purity in manner be a sufi.*

Sa'di

The cloak is sewn with the needle of devotion and the thread of the selfless remembrance of God. He or she who wishes to be honored by this cloak of poverty must, with devotion, become surrendered to a spiritual guide. True devotion draws one's heart towards the Beloved. It involves continuous attention to the Truth-Reality and constant effort to let go of attention to the self. This includes unquestioned obedience to one's spiritual guide.

The guide, by spiritual means, penetrates to the depths of the disciple's soul, transmutes his negative qualities, and brings to nothing the impurities of the world of multiplicity. In other words, the guide takes the needle of devotion from the disciple's hand and with the thread of the disciple's selfless remembrance of God, sews the sufi cloak upon the disciple. Then, by the grace of this cloak of Divine Names and Attributes, the disciple will become a perfect being.

3. Continuous, selfless remembrance of God (*zekr*).

Contained in Absolute, Infinite Unity are forces which emanate and become manifested as created beings. Each being, according to its nature, receives grace from these forces. In the realm of words, the manifestations of these forces, or truths, are expressed by Divine Names. Examples are: the Living (*al-hayy*), meaning the life of

creation is directly connected with Him; and the Transcendent (*al-'ali*), meaning the force of the universe is with Him.

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The Divine Names, in the continuous, selfless remembrance of God (*zekr*), are prescribed by the Master of the Spiritual Path, in order to cure his disciples of the disease of the self and its desires and fears. But this remembrance is of no value unless all of one's senses come to be fully centered on the meaning-reality of the respective Names. It is only by full acknowledgment and love of the reality of these Divine Names that attention to the self falls away. Then, the self becomes purified and adorned by the Divine Attributes.

*The Beloved sat facing my open heart
for so long that,
but for Her Attributes and Nature,
nothing remained of my heart.*

Maghrebi

Only in such a fashion can the repetition of the Divine Names be called the selfless remembrance of God, or *zekr*.

The disciple is like a machine whose energy comes from devotion. This machine, by means of the selfless remembrance of God, transmutes all of the self's desires and fears into Divine Attributes. Gradually, the disciple's self passes away and the Divine Nature becomes manifest; then the disciple truly becomes the recipient of the sufi cloak, and his heart and soul become illuminated by the grace of the Divine Attributes. At this point the disciple is worthy of entering the spiritual feast of the sufis, which takes place in the "Tavern of Ruin" (*kharabat*). This is the spiritual state of self-having-passed-away-in-God (*fana*). Here, the sufi directly perceives the secrets of the Truth. As is said in the *Qur'an*, "Only the purified experience It (the Truth)." These purified ones, in Sufism, are called Perfect Beings.

In order to show how the remembrance (*zekr*) is done, let us take the example of LA ILLAHA ILL ALLAH. Its meaning is, there is no god, but God (who is One).

The sufi sits either cross-legged or on his or her heels, with the right hand placed on the left thigh and the left hand over the right wrist. In these positions one's hands and legs form a **Y** LA (the negative particle in Arabic), symbolizing the nonexistence of the sufi

8 before the Beloved. In this state, the sufi must relinquish attention to and belief in this world, the hereafter, and himself.

The γ of one's arms begins at one's navel and continues up to one's neck. It is a scissors which symbolizes the cutting away of the head of one's self, and the surrendering of the belief in and attachment to one's own limited existence.

With ILLAH (god), the sufi moves his head and neck toward the right in a semicircle. This is called the arc of possible existence. The movement symbolizes the negation, or rather, the giving up of the belief in the reality of "other than God". "Other than God" in Sufism is merely all transient, limited, and possible existences. Human beings attend to these possible existences instead of the Eternal, All-encompassing, Necessary and Absolute Reality of God.

Then, with ILL ALLAH, the sufi moves his head and neck to the left. This is called the arc of necessity and symbolizes the reality of the Necessary, the Absolute Reality.

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE DIVINE

Since words are but manifestations of objects, concepts, and truths, the sufi feels that by continuous and complete attention to the meaning and reality of his remembrance of God, he becomes the true manifestation of that remembrance. That is to say, with continuous, selfless remembrance a Divine Attribute comes to predominate in the being of the sufi.

The sufis consider that there is a particular Divine Attribute which dominates the being of every prophet and saint, such that they can be said to be the incarnation of that attribute. For example, sufis feel that Moses is the manifestation of the transcendent aspect of Reality, because of his ability to speak with God without an intermediary. In the *Qur'an*, the Lord said to Moses, "Do not fear, because you are transcendent." Jesus is the manifestation of prophethood. While an infant he cried, "God gave me the book and placed me as a prophet."

All of the prophets are manifestations of the Divine Unity and Perfection, but Mohammed is its supreme manifestation. His name is the most exalted of the Divine Names, containing all the Names within it. Thus, Mohammed is the spiritual incarnation and manifestation of

all of God's Names. Mohammed himself said, "What God first created was my Light." 9

In addition, each prophet is the manifestation of one of the Divine Attributes, and all of the Attributes are contained in the most exalted Name. Also, Mohammed is the manifestation of the Great Name. So, due to the fact that his manifestation is inclusive of all the Names, he hierarchically comes before all other created things, and for the same reason said, "I was a prophet while Adam was still between water and earth."

SAMA

*If you are not one with the Beloved
Seek!
and if you are in Union,
Rejoice!*

The musical and ecstatic aspect of Sufism is called *Sama*. The sufi, while being spiritually enraptured, gives the attention of his or her heart to the Beloved. With particular movements and often special and rhythmical music, he engages in the selfless remembrance of God. In this state, the sufi is a drunken lover who becomes unaware of everything but God. With all his faculties he is attentive to the Beloved, and he has totally given up and forgotten himself.

Not all disciples engage in *Sama*. It is only given as a practice to some by their spiritual guide, who determines whether it is appropriate for them or not. *Sama* can be likened to a medicine; it is sometimes prescribed and sometimes prohibited.

SAINTHOOD

Earlier, we have said that the aim of Sufism is the cultivation of Perfect Beings who are mirrors reflecting the Divine Names and Attributes. In Sufism, a perfect being is also called a *wali* (saint), a word which literally means 'sincere friend'. All who have been prophets have also been saints. The spiritual degree of sainthood is a station indicating the condition of one's inner being, while the rank of prophethood reflects one's mission as a divine messenger.

10 The prophetic mission of Mohammed was both Absolute Sainthood and Prophecy. 'Ali, while not among the prophets, attained to this same Absolute Sainthood. Mohammed said, " 'Ali and I are of the same light," and 'Ali said, "Spiritually, I have been with all the Prophets."

In the eyes of the great sufis, the saints have included the successors of 'Ali in his spiritual-political role as first of the Shi'ite Imams. Also among the saints are the Sufi Masters who have followed the esoteric path of 'Ali.

These enlightened beings, each according to his or her own capacity, have drunk from the fountain of Truth. Because they are known only by God, only God can truly know the differences between their spiritual stations. In a prophetic tradition (*hadith*), God says, "My friends (saints) are under my banner, no one knows them but I."

Most people do not have the patience necessary to know the saints. One who is encompassed can not truly know what encompasses him. True knowledge of the saints comes from knowing their reality through one's inner being.

A common misunderstanding is the thought that by going into seclusion one can become a saint. However, in the way of the sufi, the way of Mohammed and 'Ali, one must live in society. Being a recluse and retreating from contact with people has no lasting spiritual value.

Mohammed said, "The faith of a believer is not perfect unless one thousand sincere people give witness to his 'infidelity'." He meant that the divine knowledge of a perfect believer is beyond the level of thinking of most people. Those who hear such a perfect being speak, since they can not perceive the truth of what he is saying, will call him an unbeliever.

A true believer, a sufi, must live in, serve and guide society, and be a vehicle by which society receives Grace. It is for this reason that conforming to and being in harmony with society, being at peace with all, is a quality of a perfect being.

PURIFICATION AND ITS STAGES

The stages of purification are:

1. self becoming emptied
2. self becoming illuminated

3. self becoming adorned
4. self-having-passed-away (*fana*)

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These stages occur in the course of the selfless remembrance of God (*zekr*). The first stage, becoming emptied, entails letting go of negative qualities, the desires which originate from the self. The second stage of becoming illuminated involves polishing the heart and soul of the tarnish of belief in and attachment to the self. In the third stage, one's inner being becomes adorned by Divine Attributes. Ultimately, the being of the disciple becomes completely filled by the Attributes of the Truth-Reality, to the extent that there is no sign of his own limited existence. This fourth stage is called "self-having-passed-away" (*fana*).

*I thought of You so often
that I completely became You.
Little by little You drew near,
and slowly but slowly I passed away.*

The disciple, through these stages of purification, travels the inner way, the Spiritual Path (*Tariqat*). But he or she can do so only by following the duties and obligations of Islam (*Shariat*). Having travelled this path, the disciple becomes a perfect being and arrives at the threshold of the Truth (*Haqiqat*). Mohammed said, "The *Shariat* is my speech, the *Tariqat* my actions (way of being), and *Haqiqat* my states."

One could liken the journey within the *Haqiqat*, within the Truth, to training in a divine university, the "Tavern of Ruin" (*kharabat*). In this true center for higher education there are no professors, one's only guide being Absolute Love. Here one's only teacher is Love, one's books are Love, and one's being is Love.

Before a perfect being enters this university, he or she can be defined. However, upon entering the Truth, one is indefinable, beyond the realm of words.

*Footprints but come to the Ocean's shore.
Therein, no trace remains.*

Rumi

12 If you ask his name, like Bayazid, he answers, “I lost him years ago. The more I seek him, the less I find.” If you ask of his religion, like Rumi, he answers:

*The way of a lover is not among the religions.
The church and state of lovers is God.*

If you ask how he is, like Bayazid he answers, “There is nothing under my cloak but Allah.”

If he speaks, like Hallaj, you may hear him sing, “I am the Truth.”

Such words can truly come only from perfect beings who have lost their ‘selves’ and become the manifestation of the Divine Nature and Divine Mysteries. Their selves have departed and only God remains.

طی طریق

STEPS
OF THE
PATH

Sufism: going towards the Truth, the Absolute.

As it is said in the *Qur'an*:

Those who believe, who have left their homes and striven with their wealth and their lives in Allah's way, are of much greater worth in Allah's sight. These are the ones who are triumphant.

This verse was revealed to explain the war which is incumbent upon believers in the external world, that Truth might gain victory over falsehood (i.e. Islam over unbelief). Believers must leave their homes, and not hesitate to surrender their wealth and lives.

But this is the Lesser War. The Greater War is the victory of Absolute Being over relative existence. In order to fulfill this task and reach the goal of the Truth-Reality, believers must leave the domain of the self, and pass beyond desire for both this world and the next.

So, as this verse explains, faith in God is not enough. What must be accomplished is the cutting away of the ego, the petty self; what must be done is to fly towards God. On such a path, the believer must do all that he can to surrender not only his wealth and life, but his very soul.

The FIRST STEP towards the Absolute is the stepping on all that is other than the Absolute, by going beyond both this world and the next for His sake.

As the Friend of God, Mohammed has said:

This world is forbidden for the People of the Next World, and the Next World is forbidden to the People of this world—and both are forbidden to the Men of God.

So also Shebli has said:

There are three sorts of death: dying for this world, dying for the world hereafter, and dying in the Way of the Lord. He who dies in love of this world is a hypocrite; he who dies in love of the world hereafter is a devotee; but he who dies in love of the Lord is a sufi.

It is said that Bayazid Bastami was once walking along a road with his disciples when they came upon a severed head lying by the way. Upon its forehead was written, “He loseth both the world and the hereafter.” (*Qur'an*)

Bayazid picked up the head and kissed it. When his disciples asked who the man was, he answered, “this is the head of a dervish who gave up both worlds for God.”

*My father Adam sold Eden for two grains of wheat.
What sort of son am I if I do not sell it
for one grain of barley.*

Hafez

As Hafez explains here, if the father has lost Paradise for two grains of wheat (as in the Torah it says he lost it for an apple), then he as his descendent will sell heaven for a single grain of barley. There is a subtle point here: “barley” (*juw*) in the system of numerological equivalents equals NINE; and the word “nothing” (*heech*) is also NINE. Perhaps Hafez is declaring he will trade the garden of Paradise for nothing, for the sake of God.

Sa'di had the same intent when he said:

*The Friend is enough for us—you can take all
the bounties of Paradise!*

The SECOND STEP towards the Absolute is the stepping on one's very existence, and forgetting of oneself for His sake. As Mohammed, the Prophet of God has said, "Die before you die." That is to say, die voluntarily before you are forced to die out of necessity.

Again, Hafez says:

*Between lover and Beloved there is no veil.
Hafez! Thou thyself art thy own veil.
Rise from this "between".*

So long as you remain "you", it will be impossible to reach the Absolute, for you will never see Him with the eye of this "you-ness". When *you* are not, then HE IS, He who sees Himself with His own Eye. The drop cannot see the ocean with the eye of a drop. It must first lose itself in the Ocean of Reality, that it may see the Ocean with the eye of the Ocean itself. The relative cannot comprehend the Absolute. The part must join the Whole if it is to comprehend That with absolute understanding.

It is said that when Hallaj met Ibrahim al-Khawass, Hallaj asked him what he had gained from Sufism during his forty-year connection with it. Ibrahim answered that he had made the doctrine of trust in God particularly his own. Hallaj then exclaimed, "O lose yourself! For then there'll be no need to trust in God."

This point is also illustrated by Rumi in the story of the lover who went to the door of his Beloved:

Once, a lover came to his Beloved's house. He knocked on the door. "Who is there?" the Beloved asked. The man answered, "It is I, your lover." "Go away," said the Beloved, "for you are not really in Love." Years passed, and again the lover came to the door of the Beloved's house and knocked. "Who is there?" asked the Beloved. This time the man answered, "It is you." "Now that you are I," replied the Beloved, "you may come in."

It is said that when Bayazid reached the station of Nearness, he heard a voice which ordered him, "Ask for something!" 17

"I have no desire," he replied. "You ask for something."

Again the command was repeated, "Ask for something!" Bayazid answered, "I want only Thee."

The voice then said, "So long as even an atom of the existence of Bayazid remains, this is impossible."

That spiritual Friend knocked at my door last night.
"Who is it?" I asked. He answered, "Open the door! It is you!"

"How can I be you?" I asked. He answered, "We are one, but the veil has hidden us in duality."

We and I, he and you have become the veil, and how well it has veiled you from yourself!

If you wish to know how we and he and all are one, pass beyond this "I", this "we", this "he".

Pass from this world with all its old and new, and see that all its ancientness and novelty are one.

Paintings and pictures are paintings and pictures, no doubt, but the artist is hidden in the artist's art.

In this lovely melody, behold nothing but the minstrel, for every sweet strain you hear is played by him.

O Maghrebi! You are the shadow of the Sun of the Orient, and like a shadow, you run after the Sun!

Maghrebi

God has said in the *Qur'an*, "Allah will bring a people whom He loveth and who love Him." The love of God for man precedes the love of man for God. As Maghrebi has said:

*No one by himself can find a way towards Him.
Whoever goes to His quarters walks on His feet.*

Thus, God must love the slave before the slave can love God. This road will never be travelled without God's aid and grace. It is an abundant overflow which draws one—something which is given, not something to be acquired through learning. To attain this end is

18 simply a fortunate occurrence: God scatters the seeds of “those whom He loveth”. With the guidance of a perfect Master, the receptive earth of “those who love Him” is watered; the verdant tree of human perfection, of “Return unto thy Lord, content in His good pleasure”, will raise its head to the Sky of Unity.

Hafez says:

*Even though union with Him is never given
as a reward for one's efforts,
Nevertheless, O heart, strive as much as you can!*

For although not everyone who ran after the gazelle captured it, he who captured it ran after it!

LOVE'S BAZAAR

Who opens his eyes to see You loses his blindness.

Who finds a place in Your lane loses his place.

*Your face can be seen through Your eyes only,
if at all,*

For what can any man perceive with his own?

*O You, origin of all desires and yet completely free,
What else in all the world can anyone want?*

*The merchant of Love's Bazaar is none other than the
customer himself—where then is the profit in trying
to buy and sell?*

*We, we are the veil upon Your face; but You
Yourself were never hidden, never needed to be
found again.*

Let anyone give away Love's secrets.

*For in Your presence there is neither confidant
nor stranger.*

*O Nurbakhsh, we have been in disgrace for Him
all our lives, and now no blame remains with which
to disgrace us more.*

Javad Nurbakhsh

عشق

LOVE

LOVE'S DISCOURSE

*Beyond words and their meanings, Love speaks,
using another language, different words.
My rival demands "Say something of Love!"
but for a deaf heart what can I do but keep silent?
He whose heart is aware of the Lovers' world
hears nothing but the whispering of Love—
a tongue unknown to ordinary men.
Leave behind their babble with its headaches!
He who denies Love will never grasp these phrases,
nothing we could say will ever move him,
Discourse in the School of Love is wordless—
only the bankrupt chatter behind every door.
Nurbakhsh, the breath of Love makes you eloquent,
your talk dear to the hearts of clear-sighted mystics.*

Javad Nurbakhsh

Sufism is a way to God through love.

In Iran, the term used by the sufis for Love is '*Eshq*', a word derived from '*Ashaqah*', which is a type of vine. When this vine winds itself around a tree, the tree withers and dies. So too love of the world dries up and turns yellow the tree of the body. But spiritual love withers the root of the self.

In the dictionary, '*Eshq*' is defined as "excessive love and complete devotion."

LOVE ('ESHQ)—FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF ISLAM

In the *Qur'an*, Allah proclaims, "Those who believe have great love for God." This intensity of love is called '*Eshq*'. The Prophet Mohammed has declared, "One who has intense love for God is virtuous in love, and keeps his lovemaking hidden from others; when he dies, he will undoubtedly die a martyr." In a prophetic tradition (*hadith*), God says to Mohammed:

Whoever seeks Me, will find Me.
 Whoever finds Me, will know Me.
 Whoever knows Me, will have love for Me.
 Whoever loves Me, will have 'Eshq for Me.
 Whoever has 'Eshq for Me, I will love.
 Whomever I love I will kill, and
 Whomever I kill, his blood money will I pay:
 I Myself am his blood money.

In a prayer, the Messenger of God, Mohammed, said: "I pray to see Thy Face and I long for Thy sight." Imam Husain said:

Thou art the one who removes 'that which is other' from the hearts of those who love Thee, until in their hearts there is only Thy Love.

KNOWLEDGE AND LOVE

The end result of *muhabbah* (loving-kindness) is '*Eshq* (love). '*Eshq* is the supreme and most fervent kind of love. '*Eshq* is more special and pure than *muhabbah*, since '*Eshq* is a result of *muhabbah*, but not all *muhabbah* leads to '*Eshq*. *Muhabbah*, however, is on a higher level than gnosis (*ma'rifah*), since *muhabbah* arises from gnosis, but not all gnosis leads to *muhabbah*.

INSTINCTIVE LOVE, SPIRITUAL LOVE, AND DIVINE LOVE

In instinctive love, the lover longs for the beloved for his own sake. In spiritual love, the lover longs for the beloved for his own sake, as well as for that of the beloved. In Divine Love, however, the lover longs for the Beloved not for himself, but only for the sake of the Beloved.

As Rumi has said in the *Mathnawi*:

*For those who love Him, He alone is their
 joy and sorrow.*

*He alone is their recompense and their reward.
If anything other than the Beloved is seen,
Then that is not Love, it is mere passion.
Love is that flame which when it blazes up,
Consumes all but the Beloved Himself.*

25

REAL LOVE AND TEMPORAL LOVE

Temporal love arises from the beauty of transient forms. Like them, it is also transient—its only lasting result being the perpetuation of the species. It is the result of the sublimation and the refinement of sexual desire. Real or Divine Love, however, is a profusion and a rapture from the Absolute Beloved which descends upon the heart of the sincere lover. This lover is like a moth that flutters around the beauty of the candle that is the Absolute, burning away its relative existence in His fire. The lover turns away from himself and perishes, inclines towards Him and becomes alive. When the lover is emptied of himself and becomes nothing, he finds eternal life.

A few sufi masters have considered Real Love to grow out of temporal love, and indeed it is possible for temporal love to create a vessel for receiving the outpouring of Real Love. In the words of Rumi, “His aim was the form, but through it he finally found God.”

Regarding the difference between Real and temporal love, Rumi says:

*Hey! Drink this fine fiery wine, these needles
of fire,
And fall so drunk that you will not wake on the
Day of Resurrection.
In this godly wine you will find youthful spirit.
In the fire of instinct you will never find such
unerring fidelity.*

Generally speaking, man's love is the result of God's Love, Love being one of His attributes. But more precisely, Love is an attribute of the Divine Will, Will being an attribute of the Divine Essence.

When love ('Eshq) acts on anything that exists, it is called "will", and the creation of living beings is one of its results. When Love embraces the elect, or those whom God has chosen, it is called "mercy", and when Love embraces the elect of the elect it is called "bounty". This bounty is given only to humanity, and it completes the bounties of the Benefactor. As is said in the *Qur'an*, "I completed my bounty unto you." This verse refers to that same bounty and favor which is called "Sainthood" (*Walayah*).

By virtue of this favor, by the attracting force of "He loves them", God burns away the lover's existence as lover and brings him to the state of *fana* (self-having-passed-away). Then, by the illumination which manifests the Divine Attributes of the Beloved, the lover is drawn from the state of *fana* to the state of *baqa* (permanence in the Beloved). In this state, the relative existence of the lover has gone and Absolute Existence has become manifest. Here, by the Light of God, Reality can be perceived as it is. This is the meaning of the Prophet's saying, "O God, show me all things as they really are."

Ruzbihan has said:

Love is a sword which cuts away the lover's temporal existence. Love is that perfection which comes from the perfection of the Absolute. When It unites with the lover, he will cease to be a mere slave and will no longer be caught up in the temporal world. Outwardly, he will reveal the Divine Majesty; inwardly he will attain the level of Lordship. It cannot be said that he dies, for death does not hold sway over one who lives by God's love.

Sufis believe that the foundation of the created world is Love. All motion, activity, and light throughout the entire universe as we know it derive from the rays of Love, and true perfection must be sought in and through Love. Some sufis have said, "Love is the totality of all the perfections that are in the essence of an individual, and this

entirety can only be an attribute of the Absolute.” For the same reason, ’Iraqi considered Love to be the Essence of Absolute Oneness.

27

Mir Husaini Hirawi has said:

*Love ('Eshq) is a shining star in the heaven of Reality.
It is one step above muhabbah.
Faith and unbelief are one and the same to Love.
It craves neither doubt nor certainty.
Love is a diver in the Ocean of the Absolute,
its ship is the spirit.
Indeed, Love is the dissolver of all difficulties,
And the polisher of the mirror of the heart.*

THE HEART AND LOVE

The soul encompasses the body; the heart encompasses both the soul and the body; and Love is the ruler of the heart. Some sufis have said, “The house of the heart must be made empty of everything other than Love so that Love can reside there.” However, this is an intellectual explanation. For Love, when it comes, burns and annihilates everything but the Beloved. Thus, by itself, Love empties the house.

INTELLECT AND LOVE

In discussing Intellect and Love from the point of view of Sufism, what is usually meant by the intellect is reason or the particular intellect. But, in fact, the perfection of Divine Love manifests itself as the Universal Intellect; the perfection of Love is the same as the Universal Intellect.

Reason says, “There can be no more than three dimensions, more are impossible.”

Love answers, “The way beyond exists and I have been there many times.”

*What then is Love? The Ocean of Nonexistence;
There the foot of the Intellect is dissolved.*

Intellect is always busy doing things, while Love rests, free of all these imaginary activities. Intellect has knowledge and eloquence, while Love is free from both worlds.

Intellect says, "I know the subtleties of wonderful things." Love says, "Without the Beloved, all your words are just empty breath."

Mir Husaini Hirawi has written:

Intellect says, "I do useful things."

Love says, "I risk all."

Intellect builds, saying, "This is fine here."

Love burns, saying, "This is contaminated here."

Intellect laughs, saying, "This is only name and fame."

Love flies away, saying, "This is only bait and trap."

Shaikh Najm al-Din Razi, in his book *Intellect and Love*, compares Intellect to water and Love to fire. He states:

Intellect travels in the world of being and has the attributes of water. Everywhere it goes, it flows like water and the two worlds flourish. But Love has the attributes of fire, and travels in the World of Non-being. Everywhere it goes, it annihilates; everything it touches is annihilated.

In our view, under certain conditions, the particular intellect or reason, and the love of this world can be like both water and fire. When the mind makes use of positive feelings, what results is an intellect that has the attributes of water. It brings about prosperity. Its investigations and innovations serve humanity.

On the other hand, when the mind acts without regard for positive feelings and rushes into the battlefield of life, what results is a reason that has the attributes of fire, destroying mankind and causing conflict and war.

If, however, these positive feelings harness the mind, what results is a love that has the attributes of water. Wherever it flows, others flourish and the self is emptied. This love serves others selflessly, as a cloud pours life-giving rain onto the field of all creation.

If these positive feelings do not consider the mind or are not able to make use of the mind, and go tearing wildly across the battlefield alone (with only selfish desires), the result is a love that has the attributes of fire. On behalf of the self, such a love burns up everything. In order to achieve its selfish desires, it actually destroys others.

Thus, according to the different states and interactions of the mind and positive feelings, various kinds of love and reason become manifested. In the highest state, when Divine Love obtains the services of the Perfect Mind, True Love appears. The fullness that is experienced then is described in the *Qur'an* as, "I (God) complete the giving of my riches and blessings to you."

LOVE IN SUFISM AND IN THE WEST

In the minds of Westerners, love is usually understood as the attraction or positive feelings one has for other human beings, which in its higher levels helps an individual to be drawn to Reality. From this point of view, the lover must learn the ways of love. But this is very elementary.

For the sufis, Love is not in the realm of sentiments or feelings. Rather, it is a divine attraction, the drawing of the lover by God towards God. Here, the stress is not so much on the effort of the lover, but rather on the pull of God. For this reason, Sufism says that Love is "that which comes", like a raging flood, and the sufi looks forward to its coming and carrying him away.

As Rumi has said:

*The lovers (of God) have fallen into a fierce torrent.
They have surrendered themselves to the Beloved's Will.*

Although words convey the perceptions of the soul, the soul is encompassed by the heart. And Love is the ruler of the heart. Therefore, whatever can be said about Love cannot truly express its essence, since Love is beyond the realm of idle talk.

*When I am in Love, I am ashamed of all I have
ever said about love.*

*Although a commentary in words makes things clear,
Wordless Love is yet clearer and more illuminating . . .
Like the pen which was busily writing,
until it came to Love, and then split apart.*

Rumi (Mathnawi)

Elaw

SAMA

*Our ecstasy in Sama is no superficial experience,
nor is this dance of ours something we do
for amusement.
Tell those who know nothing about it,
“O you without wisdom,
there would not be so much talk about Sama
if there were nothing essential in it.”*

Though usually translated as “spiritual music”, *Sama* literally means “hearing”. In the terminology of Sufism, it is listening with the ear of the heart to music in the most profound sense—poetry, melodies, tunes, and rhythmic harmonies—while being in a special state so deeply plunged in Love that there is no taint of self left within awareness. In this sense, *Sama* is named the “call of God”. Its reality is the wakefulness of the heart; its orientation is towards the Absolute. The sufi in the state of *Sama* is not paying attention to either this world or the next. The fire of Love burns so intensely in him that everything but God is consumed. *Sama* feeds that fire and gradually brings the Source of the sound and the listener closer and closer together until they become one.

The angelic or suprasensible world (the *Malakut*) is the realm of true beauty. Whatever is fair, beautiful, or elegant (more precisely, whatever is harmonious) is a manifestation of the *Malakut*. *Sama* puts us in contact with that world. By listening to mystical poetry and harmonious melodies, the heart of the sufi is directed towards that realm. As the Prophet has said, “God is beautiful and loves beauty.” So *Sama*, with the aid of the light of God, shatters the dark mountain of worldly existence of those who sincerely love the Truth, making the path easy for them. 33

One of the sufi saints of Shiraz, Shaikh Ruzbihan, once wrote, “*Sama* is God’s hearing; it is hearing from Him, for Him, in Him, and with Him. If it is not all of these at the same time, the person practicing *Sama* is not being faithful to God.”

In the *Sama* of the sufis, anyone who remains aware of himself and is not wholly taken up with God is not worthy of *Sama*. Therefore, it is only suitable for the perfect. Ruzbihan has also said:

*Shorn of the worldly desires and passions of the self,
disciples of Love hear Sama.*
*Cut off from their own minds,
seekers yearning for God hear Sama.*
*Deprived of their hearts,
those enamored of Love hear Sama.*
*Those who have gone beyond even their spirit,
who are totally lost in nearness to God, hear Sama.*
*If, on the contrary, hearing is with the worldly self,¹
mind, heart, or spirit,
Then one is still veiled from God.*

When the sufi becomes selfless, when the lover becomes sincere, he hears the call of God in every sound. In every melody, the Beloved beckons him. No longer does the cell of seclusion or the assembly of the sufis, being alone or being in a crowd, have any meaning for him. In every place, in every state, he sees only the manifestation of Divine Beauty and hears only the harmonious sounds of the Beloved.

1. Worldly self: that which continually and compulsively draws one into consciousness of the self and its worldly desires.

34 Sometimes he rides the surging waves of *Sama*, drunk but still existing; other times he abandons existence altogether in the Ocean of Oneness. Sometimes like 'Ali, the first master of the sufis, he will hear church bells singing, "God is pure, God is my Lord, everlasting and in need of nothing." Like Shebli (a sufi saint of the ninth century A.D.), he may hear the sound of "hu, hu" (a name of God) in the cooing of the ringdove. Like Maghrebi (a famous sufi of the fourteenth century A.D.), he may hear "Allah, Allah" in the ordinary sound of the turning of a water-wheel. Such is the *Sama* of perfect beings and pure-hearted lovers of God.

Another sufi, Mir Husaini Hirawi, has said:

*Those masters of mystical states have well proclaimed
that if you are still you, this wine is forbidden.
Where a hundred thousand great lovers become
crazed and lost, it is better that the beginner
should stay far away.
If you have not given up pursuing worldly
passions and desires,
how could *Sama* ever be permitted for you?
This delight is not for every thirsty tippler;
only a heart full of light is worthy of it.
It is the way of those who sacrifice all for God,
not the haven of a handful of impudent hypocrites.*

With the passing of time, some of the seekers on the sufi path found delight in the *Sama* of the perfect sufis and turned towards it in order to receive help from it. There is a saying of the Prophet, "Whoever imitates a people is one of them." Some, however, who did not know the secrets of *Sama* imitated this second group, simply for self gratification and to enliven their gatherings and retreats. In this way, the "Sama of self-seeking" and the "Sama of reason" emerged and became distinguished from the "Sama of Love". In the *Mathnawi*, Rumi has said:

*Not everyone is a master of the real Sama,
not every bird is able to eat figs,
Certainly not a dead bird, rotting,
full of illusions, ignorant, and blind.*

35

When those dominated by their reason turned to *Sama*, they enumerated various kinds of *Sama* which they considered lawful or unlawful in order to justify their *Sama* and differentiate it from the *Sama* of those dominated by their worldly selves. They also established rules of decorum for listening to *Sama* and found, or else manufactured, various traditional sayings to support their views. For example, Aishah, the wife of the Prophet, told the following story:

Once there was a woman in my house who was singing when Omar (the second Caliph) asked permission to enter. The woman, upon recognizing Omar's voice, hid herself. When Omar entered the house, the Prophet, who had been listening to this singing, was smiling. Omar said, "O Prophet of God, why are you smiling?" He replied, "There was a woman here who was singing, but when she heard your voice she hid herself." Then Omar said, "I will not leave this house unless I hear what the Prophet has heard." So the Prophet called the woman and she resumed her singing while the Prophet and Omar listened.

There is another tale recounted by a Companion of the Prophet, Anas ibn Malik:

I was with the Prophet when the Archangel Gabriel descended and announced, "O Prophet of God, the poor among your people will enter Paradise five hundred years sooner than the rich." Upon hearing this, the Prophet became happy and asked, "Is there anyone among you who can sing?" a Bedouin replied, "Yes, O Prophet of God." The Prophet said, "Come forward." The Bedouin did so and began to sing:

Love like a venomous snake has tormented my heart, but for this illness there is neither physician nor sorcerer. Only

my Beloved, with whom I am so much in love, can cure me, for He possesses the medicines and incantations for my malady.

When the Prophet heard this song, he went into a state of rapture and his Companions became full of joy. From the intensity of that state, the Prophet's cloak fell from his shoulders. When their bliss passed, they all went back to their own places. Then Mu'awiyah said, "O Prophet, that was enjoyable." The Prophet replied, "Mu'awiyah! What are you saying? He who does not become totally transported upon hearing the Beloved's name in *Sama* is not a noble man, worthy of honor." Then the Prophet tore his cloak into four hundred pieces and gave them to the crowd of those present.

This tradition is usually attributed to the Prophet in order to show that listening to music, going into a state of ecstasy, tearing one's clothes and distributing the pieces among the people present are customs sanctioned by the Prophet himself. (All of these things eventually became customary among certain of the later sufi shaikhs). It is a tradition which became a pretext in the hands of intellectuals who wanted to show that in the Way of Love reason also has a role to play.

CLASSIFICATION OF SAMA AND ITS PRACTITIONERS

Shaikh Ruzbihan has categorized three types of *Sama*:

There is one type of *Sama* for the common people, one for the elect, and one for the elect among the elect. The common people listen through their worldly nature and inclinations, and that is destitution. The elect listen with the heart and that is seeking. The elect among the elect listen with the soul and that is being in Love. If I express myself in these words, it is only to prevent those who have not arrived from becoming enmeshed in false conjectures, and to prevent those who are not on the Path from wasting their time.

There are three groups who practice *Sama*. The first attempt or pretend to practice; the second hear but only passively; the third are able to listen actively. The first hear at the times specified for *Sama*. The second group hear by means of the heart. But only those who really listen, listen by, with, and to God.

Another great sufi shaikh, Abu Bakr Katani of Mecca, has written:

The *Sama* of the common man arises from his following his own worldly nature and inclinations. The *Sama* of the disciples on the path arises from their desire for Truth, and from not following the worldly tendencies of the self. The *Sama* of the saints comes from perceiving the bounties and riches of God. The *Sama* of the gnostics is through mystical contemplation, as God witnessing God. And the *Sama* of those at one with the Absolute comes from God's direct unveiling. For each of these groups, there is a degree and a station.

So too, Abu 'Usman Hairi, a great sufi of the ninth century A.D., has written:

There are three types of *Sama*: the *Sama* of the beginners, the *Sama* of the sincere, and the *Sama* of the gnostics. The beginners desire a high spiritual state and as a result fall into temptation and hypocrisy. The sincere seek from *Sama* a greater intensity in their spiritual states, and they hear that which corresponds to their state at that moment. The gnostics are those who persevere on the path; in *Sama*, their consciousness is with God rather than with whatever comes into their hearts or minds from either movement or stillness.

It is also said that those who practice *Sama* can be divided into the following three groups: those of the divine truths (i.e., the Prophets), those who supplicate, and the contented poor (i.e., the sufis). The *Sama* of those of the divine truths reaches a state in which

38 they are addressed by God. Those who supplicate address God in their hearts in the form of meanings which they hear. They are truthful in what they say to God. The contented poor (the true sufis) have cut themselves off from attachments to the world with all its adversities; they hear *Sama* with a pure heart. They are the ones nearest to God.

INSTANCES OF LAWFUL AND UNLAWFUL SAMA

When God's *Sama* became mixed with the *Sama* of His creatures, and instead of being reserved for the elect of the elect became accessible to the elect, and to the common people as well, then true *Sama* left the hands of Love and fell into the grip of reason, which seeks what is expedient for man's welfare. Then reason, fearing the seductions of the worldly self, distinguished the lawfulness or unlawfulness of *Sama* in different circumstances. It had no alternative but to do so.

Abu 'Ali Daqqaq put this well when he explained, “*Sama* is unlawful for the common people because of the persistence of their worldly self. It is permissible for those who are able to abstain from the desires of their worldly self because of their efforts in the way of God; and it is recommended for our Companions because their hearts are alive.”

Al-Ghazali has categorized *Sama* in this way:

1. *Unlawful Sama*: *Sama* is unlawful for adolescents and those in whom worldly passion is still uppermost, as it would stimulate the reprehensible qualities which could dominate them.
2. *Sama* is to be discouraged for those with whom it might become a habit and who would always participate in it as if it were merely an amusement.
3. *Sama* is permissible for those who can listen to its pleasing sounds purely for enjoyment.
4. *Sama* is recommended for those in whom it increases the love of God, and who are moved by it towards only praiseworthy qualities.

Why did Al-Ghazali not mention obligatory *Sama*? One may suppose that he considered obligatory *Sama* as being beyond the range

of reason and mere words, and that he therefore reserved it for the true lovers, the elect of the elect. 39

THE RULES OF CONDUCT DURING SAMA

In *Sama* sessions of the sufis, the following rules must be observed:

1. Until the state of *Sama* spontaneously arises in one, it is not permitted.
2. One must not make a habit of *Sama*, since like any other habit, it would be blameworthy.
3. *Sama* must not be done too often or it will no longer evoke special veneration.
4. There must be no *Sama* without a sufi master or shaikh being present.
5. The general public, or those not on the path, should not be present.
6. One must act with respect towards the singer and the musicians.
7. Those participating in *Sama* must not approach it as if it were an amusing pastime.
8. One must not pretend to be in the state of *Sama*.
9. If the state of *Sama* does not arise, one must not try to force it to come; but if the state happens one should not resist it. In other words, if God moves you, allow yourself to be moved; if God does not, simply be still.
10. If the power of worldly instinct arises, it should be seen for what it is and not confused with the genuine spiritual ecstasy of *Sama*.
11. In the state of *Sama*, one should not seek help from others. If, however, assistance is offered, it should not be rejected.
12. Without the permission of the Shaikh, one must not interfere in the *Sama* of others.

40 13. During the *Sama* session, one must not lean on or against anything; this is symbolic of the fact that one must rely only on God.

14. In the *Sama* session, one must not imitate anybody.

15. Without the permission of the Shaikh, a beginner should not attend a *Sama* session.

16. One who seeks to participate in *Sama* must have a heart free from worldly passion and filled with the purity of the light of the worship of God. Furthermore, one's heart must be sincerely and wholly receptive and present in the Presence of God. Then, while in *Sama*, such a person will be far away from the tempting of the worldly self.

17. The *Sama* of those who are strangers to spiritual states, and who in their hearts have no relation with God, is tainted with self and is imperfect. He who engages in *Sama* while in this state (assuming he is aware of it) has deviated from the true path. If he is ignorant of these limitations, and considers *Sama* as stemming from himself rather than from God, then he has become a dualist. Such a person has in effect denied God. He considers Satan's whisperings to be divine inspiration, and the desire of his worldly self to be God's will. It is in reference to this that it has been said, “*Sama* can only be advised for one whose worldly self is dead and whose heart is alive.”

18. In the *Sama* session one must sit properly—without moving, and outwardly sober.

19. At the time of *Sama* one must sit with head lowered, absorbed in the remembrance of God in one's heart, not looking at others, just as one sits for daily prayers. In this way, the hearts of all participants will be one with God.

20. The singer and musicians of the *Sama* session must be sufis who feel the pain of separation from God. They must not come to the gathering for the purpose of making money or earning a living.

It has been said that in the days of Junaid, *Sama* was very popular. This was a time when many shaikhs and groups of sufis were beginning to appear. One day towards the end of a *Sama* session, it was noticed that Junaid was not singing. His disciples asked him,

“Why are you not singing?” He said, “With whom can I do so?” They said, “With yourself.” Then he asked, “From whom shall I listen?” They replied, “From yourself.”

41

This story indicates that *Sama* should be practiced with a group of those who have similar aspirations, so that all can listen together with the same pain of separation and sing with the same sincerity and devotion. Even at that time, however, those who both felt such pain and could sing with sincerity and devotion were rarely to be found.

WHY SUFIS DO NOT RECITE THE QUR’AN DURING SAMĀ, BUT INSTEAD USE ZEKRS AND POETRY

Al-Ghazali said, “There have been many times when sufis listening to the *Qur'an* being sung experienced great ecstasy. Many people in such sessions became unconscious; some even died.” Therefore, instead of singing verses of the *Qur'an*, sufis have usually used poetry and *zekrs* to help them keep the remembrance of God constant in their hearts. Other reasons for this are:

1. All verses of the *Qur'an* are not suitable for the various states of the lovers of God.
2. Although most Moslems know the *Qur'an* and read it often, normally when anything is heard repeatedly it will no longer be able to move the heart.
3. Most hearts can be moved only when they are stimulated by rhythmic vibrations, harmonies, and melodies. The state of *Sama* seldom occurs while people are listening to prose. Since it would be inappropriate to set the *Qur'an* to music, the sufis listen instead to harmonious songs.
4. To make these songs more effective, they should be accompanied by musical instruments. But the playing of instruments while reciting the *Qur'an* is a sacrilege in the eyes of ordinary (non-sufi) Moslems. It should be remembered here though that the Prophet once entered the house of Rabi’ah ‘while some girls there were playing hand drums and singing songs. As soon as they saw him, they began to praise him with poems. He said, “Stop your praise and go back to the songs which you were singing earlier.”

42 5. Everyone likes to hear words or poetry that accord with one's inner state. In ordinary circumstances, a person can decide not to listen to what does not agree with his state, or to tell the singer to recite something else. With the direct word of God (the *Qur'an*), however, such selective listening would be inappropriate.

SITUATIONS IN WHICH SAMA IS NOT ALLOWED

In arranging a *Sama* session, one must consider the time, the place, and the people taking part.

Sama is prohibited at times when one's heart is paying attention to anything other than God, when it is time for prayer, or when the heart and mind are scattered (as, for example, when one is hungry or one's stomach is full).

As regards the place, *Sama* is not permitted where the environment is disturbing or unpleasant, such as in the houses of unjust people. The reason for this is that such places upset the mind.

As for the people participating, one should not engage in *Sama*:

1. when there is someone present who is proud and caught up in worldly affairs;
2. when the singer does not believe in what the sufis believe;
3. when one of those present continually pretends to be dancing or moving as if selflessly, or tries to put himself into a state of ecstasy;
4. when there is a group present who neglect the remembrance of God and take part in *Sama* from erroneous thought, instead of from God;
5. when those present discuss ordinary things, let their attention wander, or lack respect for the *Sama* session;
6. when young people are present who are strongly dominated by their worldly selves;
7. when those attending are not free from thoughts of one another; (It is said that Mushtaq, a sufi shaikh of the eighteenth century A.D.,

in one of his *Sama* sessions suddenly raised his head and said to his disciples, "There is something present which is interfering with our *Sama*. If there is anyone among you who has a dispute with another, he must leave the gathering." At this point, two brothers who had been quarreling about some inherited land came forward and were reconciled with one another.)

43

8. when either ascetics or worldly people are present, since the ascetic is likely to have a critical attitude toward *Sama*, and the man whose attention remains on worldly matters may pretend to be in ecstasy when he is not.

THE BENEFITS OF SAMĀ

Sama is like the sun; it caresses and inflames, melts and burns.

1. Sometimes the beginners on the path find that their hearts become weary. As a result of this weariness, their state may become languid and they may neglect their spiritual practices. To correct this, some sufi masters have prescribed listening to spiritual music, pure sounds which lead one back toward God, appropriate melodies, and spiritually uplifting poetry. All this, of course, must come within the bounds permitted by religion.
2. As a result of the tendencies of the worldly self, beginners may find that there are "veils" which prevent them from realizing higher states of consciousness. If this leads to a rather prolonged separation from such higher states (as may well occur), the fire of love's longing can greatly diminish. When this happens, a love song describing the state of separation may enable the beginner to recover his motivation and renew his wish for the Truth, as a result of which the veils will be lifted.
3. It can happen during *Sama* that the whole spiritual path can be traversed in a few moments of rapture, of being intensely drawn by the Beloved. In this state, the seeker can even shake off the dust of being, the taint of his compulsive conditioning in time, and realize the timeless Oneness of God.

44 DIFFERENCES AMONG SUFIS IN THE PRACTICE OF SAMA AND ITS EFFECTS

1. Some shaikhs have become so drowned in the Ocean of God that the world around them, with all its sounds and melodies, has no effect on them. It is said that one day Mamshad Dinavari was passing by a group of beginners who were practicing *Sama*. When they saw him, they stopped. He said, "Continue with what you were doing. Even if all the distractions of the world were gathered together in my ears, they would not be able to divert me from my aim, nor would they cure my pain."
2. A few sufi masters have been continuously in a state of witnessing God from God in God. Here again, *Sama* has no effect on them. It is said that Sahl Abdullah, a sufi shaikh of the ninth century A.D., declared, "My state before praying is the same as my state in prayer." This indicates that he had reached the state of God witnessing God all the time. The state of one who has attained such a spiritual station is the same during *Sama* as it was before it.
3. Sufi masters have considered *Sama* to be a generator of difficulty for some, a help for others, and a means of increasing direct knowledge of God for still others. Ruzbihan has said:

Sama is only possible for those in a state of gnosis, experiencing direct knowledge of God. Since spiritual qualities are mixed with the body's worldly inclinations, until one has become free of these corrupting influences, one will not be receptive while in intimacy with God.

True *Sama* makes the mind tranquil and frees it from the heaviness of the ordinary human condition. It stimulates the spiritual leanings of man and discloses to him the secrets of God. For the imperfect, *Sama* will be a stumbling block or temptation, but for the perfect it will teach and guide. *Sama* is not suitable for those who are merely living a life of worldly desires, who are dead in their hearts. For such people, it can only be harmful. However, *Sama* is obligatory for those whose hearts are alive, since in that state it is possible to travel the equivalent of a thousand years of the road of gnosis with

one taste of *Sama*, a journey which cannot be accomplished by prayer or through performing any rite. 45

As Rumi said:

Sama is the tranquility of the soul of those who are alive. He knows Sama whose soul has a Soul (the Beloved). He who wants to be awakened by means of Sama is one who has been asleep in the garden. But for he who sleeps in prison, it hurts to be awakened.

Practice Sama where there is a wedding (with the divine attributes), not in a place of wailing or mourning (i.e. mourning the death of the divine attributes in people). Sama is not for the man who has not seen the substance of his own “self”, for from such a man the moon is hidden. How can Sama and the tambourine be suitable for such a person, as Sama is intended to make possible union with the Beloved.

Dhu'l-Nun, a sufi master of the ninth century A.D., once said:

Sama is what descends from God and arises in the heart of the seeker, spiritually empassioning him and increasing his yearning for God. Whoever listens to it selflessly, from God, finds the way to God; whoever listens with self-consciousness, with awareness of self, falls into duality and separation.

Sa'di, one of the greatest of Persian poets and a sufi shaikh of the thirteenth century A.D., has written:

I will not say what *Sama* is unless I know who the listener is. If it is someone who can fly in the spiritual world, *Sama* will cause him to fly higher than the angels. But if he is inclined towards play and amusement, the pull of his worldly self will be strengthened in his being. The world is full of those

intoxicated with *Sama*, those totally devoted to the Beloved. But a man who is spiritually deaf will not hear, anymore than a blind man will see in a mirror. The morning's breeze will scatter the flowers, but an axe is needed to cut up pieces of wood.

Shebli has said:

From the outside, *Sama* looks like a distraction, but its inner reality is that of guidance. For one who knows its real meaning, it is both a guide and in accordance with religious law. But for the participant who looks at it only outwardly, it is as if he is asking for trouble and attached to difficulty.

In other words, *Sama* can be a misfortune or a calamity for those whose hearts are not totally drowned in the *Sama* of God.

4. Hujwiri, the author of one of the earliest Sufi classics, *Kashf al Mahjub*, writes:

The effects of *Sama* can be very different, depending on one's degree of spiritual realization. For the penitent, *Sama* brings remorse. For those longing for God, it increases their yearning. For the believers, it strengthens their certainty. For the disciple, it verifies what he has been taught. For the lover, it helps to cut his attachments. And for the selfless sufi, it is the basis of his loss of "faith-and-trust-in-this-world", enabling him to give up everything including himself.

5. In *Sama*, some benefit more from the meaning of the words, and some from the sounds and rhythms. As Junaid has said:

The hearts of some are in the presence of God; in *Sama* these people are helped by the meaning of the words. When the words relate to their state at that time, it is by the meanings that these sufis, completely in the present moment, take part in *Sama*. Others hear mainly the sounds and rhythms and pay no attention to the words. For them, the sounds and rhythms are indeed food for the soul. When they receive this food, their state becomes such that the concerns of the self have been left behind.

6. The gnostics are affected and helped by *Sama* in various ways 47 according to their spiritual level. As Ruzbihan has said:

If the sufis are aware of their spiritual stations while in *Sama*, they will experience pain. If they are self-consciously aware of their spiritual states, they will be veiled from God. If they are conscious of listening by God's unveiling, they will be in unity. And if they listen by God, to God and in God, it will be true witnessing; and they will be in the Divine Beauty.

7. Some sufi shaikhs have said that *Sama* nourishes those who are on the Path, but that those who have arrived at the Truth no longer need such nourishment.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN THE SAMA OF THE SUFIS

Usually, the reed pipe (ney) and the tambourine are used in the sufi *Sama*. In the last century, one sufi master, Mushtaq, used to play the four-stringed sitar. In sufi poetry the reed pipe, tambourine, harp, tar, rebeck, lute and tamboura have all been mentioned. In the *Divan-i-Shams-Tabrizi*, Rumi wrote this poem about the rebab (which is the persian word for rebeck):

*The rebab, fountain of love,
companion to the intimates of God,
resembling a raincloud (indeed the Arabs
call clouds "rebab")
which slakes the garden's thirst,
feeds and intoxicates man's spirit.
Blow on coals, you get fire;
blow at dirt, you get dust.
The rebab calls back the falcon
to its royal master,
but even drums will never
fetch the crow.*

*The rebab unties lovers' knots
 if need be,
 but those who live like beasts
 can do with grass and straw,
 sleeping the sleep of desire
 and forgetfulness.*

*You cannot compare a mule
 with the loving breath of Jesus;
 God has not given mules
 the breath that opens doors.*

*Love, God's gift to the soul,
 crown of His Glory,
 tears aside the veil and brings union
 with the Beloved.*

*The call of the rebab
 draws all hearts to the One,
 The call of God frees them
 from their myriad idols.*

*Do not speak of love
 to lovers of self and the world,
 those who are pulled and tossed
 by fear and hope,
 punishment and reward.*

THE STATIONS OF SAMA

In *Sama* there are three stations: understanding, wajd, and movement.

A—UNDERSTANDING

Judged in terms of their understanding of *Sama*, people fall into three groups:

1. Those who practice *Sama* without knowing the Path and without constant remembrance of God. Their case is not worth discussing.
2. Those seekers whose minds are occupied with religion (surrender to God) and whose hearts are inclined toward the love of God. They are travelling the Spiritual Path.

Those in this category will experience different states, such as spiritual expansion and contraction, ease and difficulty, and feelings of being accepted and rejected by God. Thus, when the seeker hears in *Sama* ideas of acceptance or rejection, of nearness or separation, fulfillment or unfulfillment, and so forth, then whatever is in the seeker's mind and heart will be intensified and he will experience different states.

If a person's faith is not strong, if he is not constantly surrendering in the selfless remembrance of God, then his attention may be diverted towards his own thoughts and states, and he may fall from the Oneness of God into selfhood, and infidelity-to-the-Truth.

As an example, take the seeker on the Path who at the beginning progresses rapidly, but whose progress then slows down. This person may begin to question whether God is giving him grace any longer. By letting his attention go in this direction, by dwelling on his state and the supposed diminution of God's grace, he has become unfaithful and neglected the moment by moment surrender to God. The thought that God changes is merely an illusion; God is unchanging. It is the seeker who has changed by attending to himself, and forgetting the Oneness and the Reality of God.

3. Finally, there is the *Sama* of one who is in the degree of "self-having-passed-away" (*fana*). This person's *Sama* is by means of true understanding. When *Sama* comes to him, the states of non-existence and oneness are renewed and freshly overcome him once again.

B—WAJD

When a strong yearning for God arises in the sufi during *Sama*, and he becomes agitated and experiences various emotions, he is said to be in a state of *Wajd*.

There are four ways in which the dictionary defines *Wajd*:

1. finding what had been lost.
2. becoming rich or able.
3. being saddened by something important.
4. experiencing grief together with a burning discomfort and pain.

In the terminology of Sufism, *Wajd* is that which, when it reaches the heart, causes the sufi to become aware of fear or sadness; it is the unveiling of something from “the unseen world” to his innermost being; or it is a state between the sufi and God. Sometimes it seems to come from the pain of separation, at other times from a burning love and ardor for God, but usually it is experienced with the pain of separation. When this is felt in the sufi’s innermost being and takes charge of him, he may appear disturbed and noises or shouts may come from him. This state is called *Wajd*. As Ruzbihan has said:

Trying to experience *Wajd* is permitted only for lovers, not for others. *Wajd* does not come to those whose worldly nature is still alive in them. It is incompatible with anything other than God. Therefore, he who is centered in his worldly self will not experience *Wajd*. It arises directly from the Divine Beauty when God shows man’s spirit His Face. Such beauty a stranger to God will never see.

Some say that *Wajd* descends from the Absolute and arises in the spiritual heart of the true seeker. In its manifestation, it is sometimes experienced as joy, at other times as sadness, thus changing the inner being of the sufi.

Perhaps the most beautiful definition of *Wajd* is that given by Simnun Muhibb:

If *Sama* is God’s call to the soul, *Wajd* is the soul’s response. Unconsciousness is the result of reaching God, while weeping is one of the effects of the joy of experiencing union.

The Various Kinds of *Wajd*

Ruzbihan has said that *Wajd* may be of three kinds:

1. Most sufis experience it as an intense burning feeling.
2. The elect know it as complete surrender.
3. For the elect of the elect, it is at one and the same time a state of being conscious of one's separation from the Beloved on the material plane, yet being totally one with the Beloved on the spiritual. In explanation of this point, Mohammed Ghazali has said:

There are two kinds of *Wajd*: one belongs to the world of spiritual states and the other to the realm of unveiling of the Divine.

The first occurs when yearning, fear, the fire of love, seeking, grief, remorse or some other such quality predominates in a sufi and intoxicates him. When this happens, the heart, mind and senses are all under its spell. In this state, the sufi is asleep to the world, neither seeing nor hearing anything, no more attentive to the world of the senses than if he were drunk.

The second form of *Wajd* may either come cloaked in the form of thoughts, or it may come directly in an intuitive or contemplated vision. In this state of *Wajd*, *Sama* cleans and polishes the mirror of the heart until the true nature of Reality appears.

Such *Wajd* cannot really be explained by scientific arguments, by analogies, or by giving examples. Only those who have experienced it know its reality.

The Levels or Degrees of *Wajd*

1. *Tawajud*—this is the level experienced by a person who has not become completely selfless, but is trying to put himself in that state.
2. *Wajd*—this level of experience is for one who has gone beyond self, but is still aware that he has gone beyond.
3. *Wujud*—this is the level of one who has not only gone beyond self, but beyond even the awareness of that condition. He has surrendered even the awareness of having given up everything.

In Arabic, many words are derived from roots called "infinitives". Both *Wajd* and *Wujud* are infinitives, the former meaning "grief", and the latter "finding". The active noun (which is a derivative of the infinitive) for both words is *Wajid*. In the terminology of Sufism, *Wajd* and *Wujud* are the names of two distinct states experienced in *Sama*. *Wajd* is related to the grief brought on by feeling the loss of the Beloved, as well as the feeling of not having access to Her, while *Wujud* is related to finding the Beloved.

The subtle difference between ordinary sorrow and *Wajd* is that sorrow comes when one's attention is on the self, whereas *Wajd* is a grief of love which comes when one pays attention to God. The mysteries of *Wajd* are hidden from awareness and what is so hidden cannot be written down by the pen. So *Wajd* can be regarded as a secret between the seeker and the Sought—a secret that others cannot share. Similarly, *Wujud* is grace conferred on the lover by the Beloved—a grace which cannot be explained.

Wajd is a pain that may be felt in the heart as either joy or sadness, but *Wujud* means that the heart is freed of sadness and has reached its Beloved. The attribute of a *Wajid* is vigorous involuntary movements coming from the intensity of the sufi's yearning for God while he remains veiled from his Beloved, and complete stillness in the state of unveiling and witnessing.

One day, Junaid was sitting with some other sufi shaikhs when a singer happened to sing a few lines of poetry. The bodies of the other shaikhs began to move in the *Wajd* of *Sama*. After a while they asked Junaid, "Have you no share in this *Sama*?" In reply, Junaid quoted the *Qur'anic* verse, "And you see the hills which you think are so solid. (They are) flying with the flight of the clouds." What he meant here was that he was in *Wujud*, a state of God witnessing God, a state which the other shaikhs could not share.

Wajd then is an attribute of the disciple, while *Wujud* is an attribute of the gnostic, one who has direct knowledge of God. *Wajd* is the seeker's burning ecstasy, and *Wujud* the divine gift which God bestows on those whom he loves. He who is in a state of *Wajd* has still not gone beyond the last veil of the worldly self. By the very

consciousness of his own existence, he is veiled from God. When a moment comes in which the seeker's consciousness surrenders to the ever-present Oneness of the Beloved, a ray of the Light of God will shine upon his being; in *Wajd* he will perceive it. Then, once more, the veil "will fall" in between and that which was found will be lost again. This is the process of *Wajd*. It is a state bridging two states of separation.

The meaning of *Wujud* is that in this state the sufi's consciousness of self becomes totally absent. Thus *Wajd* is an attribute of the temporal, and *Wujud* an attribute of the Eternal. As Dhu'l-Nun has said:

Wujud resides in the ever-present Being of God, while *Wajd* resides in him who experiences it (i.e., he who experiences *Wajd* is still aware of and paying attention to his own being. His "consciousness of self" has not totally passed away in God, while the "consciousness of self" of one in a state of *Wujud* has been completely eliminated to the point that he exists and is eternal by the very Reality of God alone).

Therefore, he who still perceives his own *Wajd* remains veiled from the state of God witnessing God in God. He experiences joy as the result of his perceiving his *Wajd*. But he who at every moment allows God's witnessing of God in God to appear, and thus becomes absent from awareness of himself and his *Wajd*, his joy stops.

Wajd is the beginning of *Wujud*. It is like a boulder-throwing catapult, constructed by the pull of God, by which the sufi is ravaged by God. When the catapult time and again hurls its boulders at the walls of the fortress of "self"—consciousness and finally destroys it, then *Wajd* becomes *Wujud*. Thus, the end of *Wajd* is the beginning of *Wujud*.

It is said that one day Shebli was at the peak of a spiritual state when he came to Junaid who at that time was grieving. Shebli asked, "Dear Shaikh, what has happened?" Junaid replied, "He who seeks (God), grieves." Then Shebli said, "No, it is the other way around. He who grieves seeks." Both were correct. The former spoke from *Wajd*, and the latter from *Wujud*.

Just as *Wajd* is the beginning of *Wujud*, so *Tawajud* is the beginning of *Wajd*. *Tawajud* is an attempt to put one's self into a state

54 of *Wajd* by thinking of union, desiring to be truly God's, and speaking to the heart about witnessing and the riches of God.

Some people, who pay attention only to the superficial, imitate the external movements of those genuinely in *Wajd*; this is absolutely forbidden by the Divine Law. However, for others, who are actually seeking God and whose goal is the spiritual states and the realizations of the great sufis, *Tawajud* is permitted. Rumi had this to say about *Tawajud*:

*Sama is for the restless soul.
Rise up lightly then, this is no place for just
waiting expectantly.
Don't sit here all wrapped up in your thoughts.
If you are truly of God, go where the Beloved is.
Don't say, 'let us wait until He calls us',
for how can a thirsty man think like this?
The moth does not think of the fire as he flies
into the flame.
For a soul that loves, thought is nothing
short of disgraceful.*

The Meaning of the Cries and Appearances of Those in *Wajd*

Sufi masters have said that *Wajd* is the heart's seeing and hearing. In other words, whenever the sufi becomes tired from the trials and tribulations of love, when he sees or hears something in *Wajd*, his pain is renewed. Then cries, groans and other sounds are torn from him.

One can assess the state of a sufi in terms of the sounds and cries which come from him in *Wajd*. They may come from joy or from sadness, from fear or devotion, from yearning or from other states. One whose inner state is fearful will externally manifest dread, dumbness, and breathlessness. One who is in a state of love will show the signs of unfulfilled desire, while one whose inner state is characterized by intense yearning will manifest bewilderment. In these

The *Wajd* of Beginners and that of the Advanced

Wajd is a perfection of the spiritual state of the beginner and an imperfection of the spiritual state of the advanced, since it applies the temporary regaining of a state of God witnessing God. One cannot speak of "regaining" without having first lost that state:

*To the one whose comfort is found in *Wajd*,
it brings joy.*

*But for he who is in a state of God
witnessing God, *Wajd* does not exist.*

The *Wajd* of the seeker takes place only up to the state of *fana* (when consciousness of self has fallen away with the coming of the light of God witnessing God), but when the sufi's consciousness is of Oneness, there is no *Wajd*. Therefore, whoever experiences *Wajd*, has lost the state of realizing Absolute Reality. The reason for the loss of the selfless state of God witnessing God in God is that the qualities of existence have manifested themselves. These qualities are of two kinds, of the light and of the dark. To the darkness belong the attributes of the "self". Such qualities are the veils of beginners. To the light, on the other hand, belong the qualities of the heart, which are the veils of the more advanced—those who have surrendered themselves to God to the extent that the veils of their worldly desires and fears have fallen away and only the veils of their spiritual attachments remain.

Some shaikhs have allowed beginners to engage in *Tawajud* not for the purpose of reaching a true spiritual state in *Wajd*, but simply for comforting the troubled heart and ridding the mind of fatigue. Thus, one can give oneself to rhythmic movements accompanied by pleasing songs so that for a short time one's "self" will be relieved of the pain and burden of responsibility.

In some cases, those who engage in *Tawajud* try to storm the gates of *Wajd* by imitating those who really experience it, hoping in

56 this way to draw down upon themselves its spiritual grace. Although this form of *Tawajud* is permitted for the beginner, it is of course unsuitable for sufi masters whose inner and outer states are the pure Truth-Reality.

Especially when in the presence of a sufi shaikh, a sufi should not cry out unless he cannot control himself.

As the master of Junaid (Sari Saqati) said, “It is permissible for one in *Wajd* to cry out and make sounds on the condition that at the instant of the cry, if he were struck on the face by a sword, he would not feel the pain.”

Sama for the spiritually advanced does not induce crying and clamor because these noises happen as a result of God manifesting in such a way that the sufi’s consciousness does not fully surrender. Then, the falling away of his “self”—consciousness is abruptly halted and an involuntary cry comes from his body, as he is being shocked back into his ordinary state.

On this point, one of the companions of Sahl ibn Abdullah Tastari, a sufi master, has said:

For years I did not notice any changes in Sahl during *Sama* until, towards the end of his life, this verse of the *Qur'an* was recited in his presence:

“So this day no ransom can be taken from you, nor from those who disbelieved. Your home is the fire that is your patron and a hapless journey’s end.”

With this, his state suddenly changed and he shook so hard that he almost fell down. When I asked him why, he said, “From weakness.”

Errors in *Wajd*

1. Sometimes the deliberate manifestation of the signs of *Wajd* is a form of lying before God. Since the involuntary manifestation of true *Wajd* in *Sama* is an indication that God has given the sufi a spiritual gift, he is lying before God if he acts as if he were in *Wajd* when really he is not.
2. It is a mistake for a person to endanger those present in the *Sama* gathering by willfully manifesting signs of a state that he does not really have at the moment. This amounts to betrayal.

3. It is also a mistake to destroy the trust of those who believe in Sufism, thereby preventing them from receiving spiritual help from sufis. When some of those present in the *Sama* session believe that someone is a true sufi because of the way he acts when imitating *Wajd*, then afterwards, when he does something to upset their belief, they may lose their trust in the truth of Sufism and decide that all sufis behave the same way. As a result, their opportunity of receiving help from the sufis may be lost.

Thus, he is truly in *Wajd* who does not move until his being is completely overwhelmed in *Sama* and movements spontaneously and involuntarily come upon him.

C—MOVEMENT (DANCING)

*Dancing is not getting up anytime painlessly
like a speck of dust blown around in the wind.
Dancing is when you rise above both worlds,
tearing your heart to pieces and giving up your
soul.*

Rumi

Iraqi, a sufi master of the thirteenth century A.D., has written:

The Beloved, by saying the word “*Kun*” (“Be!”), awoke the lover from the sleep of non-existence. Hearing (*Sama*) this melody, he was overcome by *Wajd* and from it received his life. The immediate taste of this melody penetrated his whole mind. Love took over, and at that point, man’s complete stillness was transformed into sacred dance and movement. Until eternity without end, neither the melody nor the dance will be completed, for the Beloved is infinite and endless. Thus the lover is continuously in spiritual movement and dance, even if he seems still.

Sometimes the movements of sufis in *Wajd* are like dance

58 movements. This indicates a very advanced degree of *Wajd*. When this state comes, passion and yearning for the Beloved take control of his limbs and body. Intoxicated by Divine Love, without awareness of self and without his volition, his feet may stamp on the ground and his hands may clap. This is called the “Dance of Oneness”.

Neither in the *Shariat* (which lays down the religious duties of Moslems) nor in the *Tariqat* (the Spiritual Path) is there any basis for dancing. But since the movements of those in *Wajd* and the actions of those taking part in *Tawajud* resemble dancing, people who have seen only their outer behavior have initiated these movements and even gone further and set up “spiritual paths and groups” based on them. Often, it is these groups which people have come to think of as “Sufism”.

In true Sufism, the tearing of clothes, and all movements and dancing are involuntary.

A Persian poet, Khaqani, has written:

*See the falcons who have flown from the nest
of the Path (Tariqat);
In Wajd they are like homing pigeons, whirling
and turning.*

In the sayings of the Prophet, involuntary movements of *Wajd* are recorded as follows:

It is said that the Prophet once said to 'Ali, “You are of me, and I am of you.” When he heard this, 'Ali became ecstatic and involuntarily his feet beat the ground.

The Prophet once said to Ja'far, the brother of 'Ali, “You are like me in both looks and character.” Here again, in *Wajd*, Ja'far involuntarily stamped on the ground.

It is recorded that Ruzbihan was once on the roof of a *khaniqah* while in a state of *Wajd*. It happened that a group of young people was passing by in the alley below, playing musical instruments and singing:

*O heart, in the neighborhood of the Beloved
there is no wailing,
nor are the roof, door or windows of her
house guarded.*

*If you are ready to lose your soul,
get up and come now, for the field is empty.*

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When he heard this, an ecstatic state overcame Ruzbihan and flung him from the roof, whirling and turning in the air, to the ground below. On witnessing this, the group of young people cast away their instruments, left their former ways, entered the *khaniqah* and became sufis.

Abu Sa'id Abu'l-Khair, a sufi master of the eleventh century A.D., considered that clapping hands and stamping feet could help young people lessen, at least for a time, the grip of their worldly passions and desires. About this he has said:

It is in the nature of young people that they are not free of desires. These dominate them and control their bodies. If they clap their hands and stamp their feet, the intensity of their desires will be lessened and they will be better able to control their outward actions. It is better to release some of the excessive intensity of their emotions (in the name of God) in *Sama* than to have to let it out among people, with possible injury to oneself and others.

One of the greatest Persian mystics, Shaikh Suhrawardi, who lived in the thirteenth century A.D., understood the dance of the sufis as a kind of worship, provided it was done with the correct intention. However, he considered it to be religiously prohibited if people were dancing to show off a supposedly ecstatic state.

In any case, *Sama* is not what those who call themselves Sufis do in imitating the involuntary and ecstatic movements of real sufis. Nor is it that which is performed by people who go about from city to city to make a living, and who, in order to build up their "spiritual business", take scorpions' tails between their lips, place the heads of poisonous snakes in their mouths, drive spikes into their bodies, chew

60 rocks and broken glass, and consider these things to be signs of divine miracles and grace.

On this point, Rumi has written:

*These spiritually destitute people that you see,
knowing nothing of the Truth,
they worship themselves. Leave them alone!
They are owls in the ruins that constitute this world,
far removed from the melodies of nightingales.
They have fixed themselves up to look spiritual,
but it is impossible to find a trace of true
spirituality in any of them.*

Dancing and movements that are not involuntary, though considered by some people as a means of purification and of arriving at Love and Truth, are not the *Sama* of the sufis. Dancing as such will not cause anyone to reach the Ocean of Love. Rather it is he who is already in Love, the true lover, who becomes absent from himself and is overcome by spontaneous movement and dancing.

As Mir Husaini Hirawi has said:

*If they think that their rites, mannerisms and
actions are the method,
then they have left and forgotten the way of
God's people.*

Some sufi shaikhs have considered that consciously dancing and moving in *Tawajud* could be a way to facilitate liberation by breaking one's resistance to surrendering to the Beloved.

In this context, Rumi has said:

*Dance where you can break yourself to pieces
and totally abandon your worldly passions.
Real men dance and whirl on the battlefield;
they dance in their own blood.
When they give themselves up, they clap their hands.
When they leave behind the imperfections of the*

*Their minstrels play music from within;
and whole oceans of passion, foam on the
crest of their waves.*

In some cases, the movements of the sufis have a special meaning. On the Spiritual Path, there are various movements to accompany certain *zekrs* that are aimed at establishing the selfless remembrance of God in the heart. The purpose of such movements is to harmonize the body with the heart; these movements must be done while the attention is in and of God, with the corresponding *zekr*. Among these movements are the whirling of the body, and the moving of the neck from side to side. These are well-known and understood actions for the sufis, which must be done in private. However, sometimes a sufi may become so absent from himself that the movement corresponding to his *zekr* will show itself in public. Those who see it may not understand what it really is, and may think it is a form of dancing. Thus, as an example, we may recall the whirling movements of Rumi while he was in *Wajd* and his heart was involved in his *zekr*.

As Aflaki in the *Manaqib-al-arifin* has written:

While in a state of being wholly under the influence of *Sama* and his passion for God, Rumi was walking by the shops of some goldsmiths. Just from the rhythm of the pounding of their hammers, such an intense spiritual passion and ecstasy came upon him that his whole body began to whirl.

SAMA IN THE TIME OF SHAH NE'MATOLLAH WALI

(Sufi Master of the fourteenth century A.D.)

In Shah Ne'matollah's time, there were *Sama* sessions which were conducted in accordance with the injunctions of religious law and proper behavior.

Some of the characteristics of these sessions were as follows:

1. In the *Sama* sessions of Shah Ne'matollah (unlike the ordinary *Sama* gatherings at that time), dancing, whirling and turning were not common.

62 2 In his sessions, there was hand-clapping and sometimes the playing of the reed pipe and the tambourine, but the other musical instruments of that period were not used.

3. At the beginning of the gatherings, Shah Ne'matollah would sit down facing the *Qiblah*.¹ At his word, those sufis who were present would then turn the attention of their hearts towards the Beloved and would begin their *zekrs*, usually in the form of “*La illaha ill Allah*”, which is usually translated as “(There is) No god but God”, or “(There is) No reality but the Reality”. During the repetition of the first part of this *zekr* “*La illaha*” (“No god”), the sufis moved their heads to the right, signifying “no”, or as it is sometimes called, the action (arc) of negation of possibility. Then, with the saying of “*ill Allah*” (“but God”), they moved their heads to the left, towards the heart, signifying “yes”, or the action (arc) of affirmation of Necessity.

In whichever direction Shah Ne'matollah moved his head, a feeling of expansion and joy would arise in the hearts and souls of those present. At the end of the session, the sufis would prostrate themselves before God, and Shah Ne'matollah would lead them in prayer.

Abd-al-Aziz Wa'izi, one of the biographers of Shah Ne'matollah, has written:

During the *Sama* session, Shah's state combined that of the intoxicated lover with that of the skilled warrior who has turned away from the world and everything in it, and become one with the Beloved witnessing the Beloved in the Beloved.

1. *Qiblah*: the direction of Mecca which Moslems face when they pray, symbolizing the orientation of the body, the mind, and the heart towards God.

آداب خانقاہ

THE RULES
AND
MANNERS
OF THE
KHANIQAH

*Those who suffer for you sit waiting for relief
They have renounced themselves, their hearts and religion.*

*In good faith your lovers have travelled the road of loyalty
Now sit waiting on your threshold, pure of heart.*

*The beggars sit in the royal court of your grace
hearts content, needs fulfilled.*

*Your dependants, they have nothing to do with worldly kings
But prefer to sit in total poverty within your kingdom.*

*Worshippers of your wine circle the cask, take up the glass
and sit there, no longer questioning, serene.*

*Afflicted, wounded by you, they judge their souls worthless
Why then should they sit waiting for medicine?*

*In God's house God's men cannot sit
negligent, like you false pretenders.*

*Light shines to the highest heavens from the gathering
of the sufis, wild ones, sitting for God by God in God.*

Javad Nurbakhsh

IN THE NAME OF THE MOST EXALTED DEGREE

*Till the end of eternity, the perfume of love will
never reach the heart
of he whose face has not touched the dust of
the Tavern's threshold.*

Hafez

The *Khaniqah* is by definition the private quarters and gathering-place of the sufis. It is a place where those of spiritual states can assemble, the school of their inner journey toward Perfection. The seekers of God come there to polish the mirror of their hearts and remove the rust of attachment. It is the *Kaaba*¹ of Lovers. It is the *Qiblah*² of the sincere, the realm of those who possess the secrets, who are in need of nothing. It is the refuge of the vigilant, who have fearlessly rent open their breasts, torn out their hearts, and become totally selfless. Therein dwell the faithful, the companions of purity. And there one can hear nothing but the beautiful melodies of the

1. *Kaaba*: the house of God in Mecca.

2. *Qiblah*: the direction facing the *Kaaba* in Mecca towards which all Moslems pray.

Beloved; one can inhale no fragrance but the gentle air of love and fidelity. Its aspirants have sacrificed all belief, have given up their hearts, and have readied themselves for the final leap into total self-abandonment. Everyone is a stranger to them but God. They transcend all reason, yet to the devotees of the intellect they appear mad. Those esteemed high there have set aside "I" and "we" for the invocation "I am God".

Indeed, Love has many wonders which the intellect considers madness. True and sincere aspiration is needed to shatter the chains of the intellect, to follow the order of "madness" and leave oneself behind. Thus, in coming to the *Khaniqah*, one will reach a state beyond one's perception and will realize that the *Khaniqah* is a manifestation of the Throne of God:

*From the terrestrial to the celestial domain
all veils are torn
For he who serves the goblet
which shows the Universe.*

Hafez

This goblet in which the whole world is manifested is the heart of the Perfect Man. The sufi in the *Khaniqah* serves the possessor of the heart (the perfect man). Here, the constant remembrance of God is upon all tongues, and the name of the Beloved is engraved on all hearts. The Love of the Beloved leaves no place for hostility. The lightning of Love and loving-kindness radiates throughout the atmosphere of the *Khaniqah* and illuminates all eyes. Here, inner peace and contentment are achieved. He who is silent here is in meditation and contemplation. He who is speaking says naught but the Beloved's name.

*This is no Kaaba
For idiots to circle
Nor a mosque
For the impolite to clamor in.*

*This is a temple of total ruin.
Inside are the drunk, from pre-eternity
to the Judgement Day,
gone from themselves.*

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Khwajah Esmat Bokhara'i

OBSERVANCE OF THE MANNERS (ADAB¹) OF THE KHANIQAH

The essence of Sufism is Islam, and the essence of Islam is true sincerity with God. The quintessence of sincerity is surrender, inward serenity, and obedience to the Beloved. A Moslem is one of moderation, integrity, friendship, and good deeds. His heart is in constant remembrance of the Beloved, and his tongue is in the service of the Beloved. Awaiting His command, his eyes are fixed upon the path of the Beloved. This blessing can by no means become possible except by observing the rules and manners of the Spiritual Path (*tariqat*), of which the *adab* of the *Khaniqah* is one part. As it is sometimes said: "The whole of Sufism is *adab*."

*Come to the tavern
Drink the wine
Go not to the cell-squatters in the monastery
For their deeds are dark.*

Hafez

ADVANTAGES IN GOING TO THE KHANIQAH

There are many diverse advantages for the sufis in going to the *Khaniqah*. These can be divided into secular and spiritual advantages.

1. *Adab* is a term containing many meanings; depending on the context it may be translated as "rules of behavior", "how to be (or behave)", "etiquette", "culture", "civilization", "literature", "decorum", "good manners", or as a code for sufis.

I. SECULAR ADVANTAGES

1. Through talking and associating with the dervishes in the *Khaniqah*, one acquires the manners of sufis, which are the ethics of humanity. This in itself is of great value. It is necessary for each sufi to learn the proper social behavior for interrelating with those of purity (i.e. the sufis); this is dependent upon going to the *Khaniqah*. As a result, at least outwardly one will be able to call oneself a sufi.
2. Material difficulties and worldly involvements can be resolved through close contact with one's fellow dervishes. This service to one another is the essential basis of all fraternity. In addition, the elimination of such difficulties leaves one more free time for resolving spiritual difficulties.
3. Through associating with one's fellow dervishes, a greater intimacy is promoted among all the members of the *Khaniqah*. From the other dervishes, one acquires the proper manners and behavior of sufis, and thus the qualities of perfection.
4. By regularly attending the *Khaniqah*, one is prevented from going to other gatherings which are colored by the attachments of the world of multiplicity. This is a great blessing from which many benefits will ensue.
5. The absence of a sufi on the nights of the meetings causes the *Pir-e dalil*¹ and the other dervishes to seek out the reason for his absence. Thus, they ask after him and seek to offer aid and consolation in any difficulties he may have.
6. Talking to dervishes whose hearts are pure brings comfort to one's heart and mind.

II. SPIRITUAL ADVANTAGES

1. Going to the *Khaniqah* and seeing one's fellow dervishes reminds the spiritual wayfarer (*salek*) not to neglect the sacred purpose. Thus, one becomes occupied more than ever with the work of the heart, and so maintains a constant vigilance over the neglectful impulses of the worldly self.
2. The attentions of the Shaikh and the elder of the *Khaniqah* upon

1. *pir-e dalil*: Counselor, advisor, and mediator between the disciple and the Master or Shaikh.

the seekers help greatly to stimulate their inward expansion, further their spiritual development, and aid them in attaining their aim and finishing the Spiritual Path. With experience, the full significance of this will ultimately become clear to the seeker.

3. Observing the spiritual states of one's fellow dervishes (especially those who with great enthusiasm and deep feeling are constantly engaged in carrying out spiritual duties and service) has a great effect in stimulating and encouraging the aspirant.

4. The proper conditions and atmosphere for the performance of the duties of the sufi are, in every sense, available in the *Khaniqah*. Thus, the sufi is enabled with no impediment whatsoever to maintain a constant state of remembrance of God.

5. The beginner, in the company of sufis, can better remain in a state of remembrance than if he were alone. The benefits gained from the gathering of the sufis are considerably greater than those which would result from being in solitude. The reason for this is that in the sufi gathering multiple breaths achieve a unified harmony with one another. Thus, the participants are unanimously attentive to a single aim, and the realizations which result are considerably intensified and heightened:

*The wing of Gabriel is spread there
Where the sufis invoke Hu!
Contrary to their selves, they cry out drunkenly
In remembrance of God.*

sufi poem

THOSE RESPONSIBLE IN THE KHANIQAH AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

*Around the tavern door
the wild, the vigilant swarm
Bestowing and withdrawing
the imperial crown.*

Hafez

1. *Hu*: one of the names of God in Arabic, meaning "He".

70 The Shaikh, *Pir-e dalil*, and the *Doudeh-dar*² give warmth to and enlighten the *Khaniqah*.

THE SHAIKH

Both the worldly and the spiritual affairs of the *Khaniqah* are under the supervision of the Shaikh. All orders of the Shaikh are to be obeyed unquestioningly and unconditionally; and the sufis should never object to them.

Qualifications Upon Which the Shaikh is Selected

The Shaikh is selected by the *Qutb* (sufi master) from among people with the following qualifications:

1. He or she should have not less than twelve years experience upon the path of spiritual poverty (*faqr*).
2. He should possess an intimate understanding of the duties of a master in relation to a disciple, and he must be effective in applying them. In addition, he should be familiar with the mysteries of spiritual poverty and Sufism (*tasawwuf*), and be aware of the instructions of loving-kindness and the intimations of Love.
3. He must have previously been given permission to be a *pir-e dalil*.
4. He must possess the qualities and virtues of human perfection and be of a generous, self-sacrificing, and magnanimous disposition.

When a dervish has fulfilled the above conditions and has surmounted the inward trials to which the Sufi Master subjects him, the honorable robe of guidance is bestowed upon him, and he is permitted to assist and guide seekers.

The Shaikh's Duties in the Khaniqah

*Love itself is your Beloved
And when you attain to It
It will tell you
What to do.*

2. *doudeh-dar*: tea-master.

sufi poem

1. He or she must pay constant attention to secure and safeguard the welfare and prosperity of the *Khaniqah*.

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2. Maintenance and replacement of the equipment of the *Khaniqah* is solely his responsibility.

3. Accommodation of dervishes for whatever length of time in the *Khaniqah* must be in accordance with his permission.

4. All his free time should be spent in the *Khaniqah*.

5. The holding of the various gatherings of the sufis (*zekr, niyaz*, and *deeg-jush*), festivals and funeral ceremonies, must be conducted only with his approval.

6. The admission to the *Khaniqah* of sufis not belonging to this Order should be only with his sanction and approval.

7. He must supply an annual report on his own activities, on the welfare and general state of the *Khaniqah*, its financial affairs, and any improvements that he has made in the *Khaniqah*'s facilities. This report should be submitted to the present *Qutb*.

8. He must be present in the *Khaniqah* on Thursday and Sunday nights¹ before sunset, unless he has a valid excuse. He should depart from the *Khaniqah* in the morning (or at night, if he does not keep the night vigil) only after everyone else has left.

9. He should not seek to increase the number of dervishes. Those who come to the *Khaniqah* have been brought by God, and those who abandon the *Khaniqah* have been taken by God.

The Shaikh's Duties to the Dervishes

1. The Shaikh is affectionate with the sufis, and will not do anything which might antagonize them.

2. The Shaikh is always careful to observe sufi *adab* in the presence of other dervishes, for he is the supreme example of the principles of sufi behavior.

3. He does not in any way seek material help from dervishes, but rather may make recommendations for their benefit.

1. The nights of the sufi gathering.

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4. He inquires about the spiritual states and experiences of the dervishes, and (while keeping in mind their individual spiritual capacities) encourages them by reminding them of the behavior and discourses of the great sufis of the Path.
5. He acts in such a way with the dervishes that they understand he does not consider himself superior to them because of his being a shaikh. Rather, he considers himself beneath them as he knows his eminence lies in service, and not in being a shaikh.
6. With the sufis he acts selflessly, with compassion and moderation. He withholds no blessing or grace from them, nor any of his sympathy or advice. If, because of the distractions of the world of multiplicity, a languidness or state of spiritual contraction (*qabz*) overcomes the dervishes, the Shaikh (by means of encouraging advice and spiritually elevating stories) attempts to polish this dust from the mirror of their inner selves. Thus, once again the fire of ardor will be rekindled in their hearts.
7. Never should the acclamation or praise of others, the revelations of his own spiritual life, his traversing of the spiritual stations, or the occurring of a spiritual state make him think that thereby he has become perfect or "in union". He should not let the seductions of his worldly self deceive him.

The Shaikh's Duties to the *Qutb*

1. He seeks inwardly and ceaselessly the grace of the *Qutb* in order to better perform his inner and outer tasks.
2. Every month, he prepares and sends off a report to the *Qutb* concerning his own and the other dervishes' spiritual progress.

PIR-E DALIL (COUNSELOR)

The *Pir-e dalil* is the assistant and consultant to the Shaikh. Traditionally, the function of the *Pir-e dalil* has been to reprimand, whereas the Shaikh's role has been to console. The selection of the *Pir-e dalil* depends upon the proposal of the Shaikh and the permission of the *Qutb*. The following points should be observed in the choosing of the *Pir-e dalil*:

1. He should have had continuous and prolonged experience in Sufism (over twelve years). 73

2. He should have passed through at least three of the spiritual stations of Sufism.

3. He should have the ability to discuss adequately and solve difficult points of mysticism and problems of the Spiritual Path.

4. He must have a deep understanding of different temperaments and the conduct proper for each one.

5. The *Pir-e dalil* should have perfect cognizance of the secrets and rules of Sufism, as he must first instruct anyone seeking to be initiated until the Shaikh verifies that person's suitability for initiation. In short, the *Pir-e dalil* should be able to clearly discuss and present (according to each person's respective capacity) the way, method, and aim of Sufism.

6. It is better if he has served previously as a *doudeh-dar* (tea-master).

The Duties of the Pir-e Dalil

1. The *Pir-e dalil* should familiarize those who seek to be initiated with the way, method, and aim of Sufism.
2. Before initiation, he should instruct the novices in the proper behavior to be observed in the sufi gathering and in meetings with the Shaikh and the other sufis.
3. If a dervish acts contrary to the rules of the *Khaniqah*, he is to be reprimanded by the *Pir-e dalil*. The sufis know that the admonishing by the *Pir-e dalil* is as necessary as the consoling by the Shaikh. These admonitions (*tanbih*: literally "awakening") are to train the dervish so that he will not form a careless and inattentive attitude.
4. The organization of the sufi gathering is under his supervision and is his responsibility.
5. He must be careful that non-dervishes are not admitted to the sufi gathering except with the explicit permission of the Shaikh. Should a dervish bring his spouse, child, or friend along with him to the *Khaniqah* on a Thursday or Sunday night, the *Pir-e dalil* must first

74 obtain the Shaikh's permission for their entrance. If granted, they may be allowed to enter.

6. The *Pir-e dalil* is responsible for supervising the affairs of the *Doudeh-dar*, the servitors (*ahl-e khedmat*), and the travelling dervishes residing at the *Khaniqah*.

7. If a dervish who comes regularly to the *Khaniqah* on the appointed nights does not attend one night, the next day the *Pir-e dalil* should inquire how he is. He also seeks to aid the dervish in any difficulties that he might have in order to resolve them.

8. If a sufi consults him concerning some inner problem or worldly entanglement, he should sympathetically and with loving-kindness guide him and help him to resolve it.

DOUDEH-DAR (TEA-MASTER)

In all affairs of the *Khaniqah*, the *Doudeh-dar* follows the orders of the *Pir-e dalil*. His selection is also the responsibility of the *Pir-e dalil* (depending upon the permission of the Shaikh and the approval of the *Qutb*). A *Doudeh-dar* should possess the following qualifications:

1. He should not have less than twelve years experience in Sufism.
2. He should have passed through at least two of the spiritual stations of Sufism.
3. He should be experienced and tried in Sufism so as to have an adequate understanding of the proper way of behavior with the dervishes.
4. He should be inwardly rich and generous, with high aspirations and a forbearing nature.
5. He should possess great endurance and patience, being both dignified and firm, smiling, pure-hearted, and courteous.

The Duties of the Doudeh-Dar

1. With the dervishes, he acts with such great kindness and purity

that his excellent behavior becomes a strong factor in further motivating them to come to the *Khaniqah*.

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2. He should prevent the consumption of any sort of drugs in the *Khariqah*.

3. He acts kindly toward travellers staying in the *Khaniqah*, and sees to their material needs with the utmost respect and consideration.

4. He does not make any distinction among the sufis because of their wealth, parentage, or social position; he sees everyone in the same light.

5. He cheerfully and open-heartedly greets anyone who comes to the *Khaniqah*, whatever his religion or cultural background, and endeavors to make sure that no one ever leaves with disappointment the door of the *Khaniqah*.

6. He should with kindness instruct, admonish, and advise the young people of the *Khaniqah*.

7. He should not be negligent in maintaining the cleanliness and welfare of the *Khaniqah*.

8. If a dervish speaks harshly to the *Doudeh-dar*, he does not become offended or react against him in return. Rather, he should increase his affections toward him and humble himself all the more; this itself is the greatest possible punishment for the dervish.

9. Whenever at any time during the day or night a dervish arrives at the *Khaniqah*, he should greet and treat him with the utmost friendliness, courtesy and respect, preferring his guest's comfort to his own.

10. If the equipment of the tearoom (*doudeh*) is in some way deficient or lacking, he should not complain. Rather, he must be patient as far as he is able. If, however, he is unable to do so, he should consult with the *Pir-e dalil*.

DERVISHES OF SERVICE

Those dervishes who possess inner potential, sincerity, and good manners are chosen by the *Pir-e dalil* for service in the sufi gathering. These are the "servitors" (*ahl-e khedmat*). They are of gentle behavior, and are eager to be in the service of the *Khaniqah*.

1. Sufis must highly respect and esteem dervishes of service.
2. Sufis should not give orders to the servitors, but if they have some business which they are unable to perform themselves, they may politely request the servitors to do it for them.
3. The servitors should perform the duties assigned to them with dedication and devotion.
4. The servitors should not give priority to any of the sufis because of their wealth, parentage, or social position. That is to say, during ceremonies and receptions, they should be careful to treat all equally—passing tea, cookies, etc. around to everyone.¹
5. In their encounters with everyone, the servitors should observe the manners of the dervishes, the highest of all human ethics. They should always consider themselves as servants of all people, especially sufis.
6. In the festivals held at the *Khaniqah*, they must show children the same respect as they do adults.

THE DUTIES OF THE SUFIS CONCERNING THE KHANIQAH

There are certain duties the sufi has to the *Khaniqah*, which are outlined below:

1. A dervish should be neat in appearance and in a purified state when entering the *Khaniqah*, always wearing his cleanest clothes. It might even be wise if he put aside special clothes for going to the *Khaniqah*:

Purify thyself.

*Then attend the Tavern of Ruin (kharabat)
That it not be polluted by you.*

Hafez

1. Literally, they should “consider the circle” which signifies the sufi ritual of serving in a circular fashion, from right to left.

2. If at all possible he should never come to the *Khaniqah* 77 empty-handed, for as he knows:

*Coming empty-handed to the doors of friends
Is like going wheatless to the mill.*

Rumi

He should estimate the needs of the *Khaniqah* when he goes there, and bring along whatever can be afforded.

3. Upon entering the *Khaniqah*, he should completely set aside all thoughts of the world and its affairs.
4. He should be extremely careful in the maintenance and protection of the equipment of the *Khaniqah*.
5. He should understand that the *Khaniqah* is the real home of the sufis; and for his own part, he should try as far as possible to help preserve the welfare, prosperity, and upkeep of its facilities, not waiting for anyone to remind him of his duties.
6. Whenever possible, he should make a contribution to the treasury of the *Khaniqah*. He may give this either to the Shaikh or the steward of the *Khaniqah*. Each dervish should decide how much he wishes to give; it is totally his own responsibility. Furthermore, it is not necessary to pay a fixed amount each month.
7. A sufi must be present in the *Khaniqah* on Sunday and Thursday nights. On Thursday nights, it is better if the dervishes keep the night vigil together in the *Khaniqah*. No dervish is permitted to be absent from the *Khaniqah* on Thursday nights without a reasonable excuse (private business, travel, or sickness). However, even if a dervish is excused from attending on a particular Thursday night, he must still be present in the *Khaniqah* for at least a short period of time.
8. If it is at all possible, a dervish should try to come to the *Khaniqah* before sunset and perform his evening prayers there.
9. When a sufi who is fasting enters the *Khaniqah*, he should inform the *Pir-e dalil* or *Doudeh-dar* of his condition before sunset (the time of breaking the fast in Islam).
10. At all times, he should prefer attending the *Khaniqah* to the superficial gatherings of the world.

78 11. In the *Khaniqah*, the sufi should concern himself with nothing but the remembrance of God in the heart.

12. In the *Khaniqah*, the sufi must neither speak, see, nor hear (that is to say, must not manifest the existence of his "self") without the permission and order of the Shaikh or the *Pir-e dalil* of the *Khaniqah*.

13. The sufi must unhesitatingly accept any food which is given to him in the *Khaniqah*, and know that whatever comes to him is his own portion and fortune. At all times and in all states, he should be thankful and content with whatever God provides.

14. Without the permission of the *Pir-e dalil*, a sufi should never perform any service for the *Khaniqah* which has not been assigned to him.

15. If anything causes the dervish displeasure or irritation in the *Khaniqah*, he should accept and understand this to be what is divinely intended for him. He must never let himself be upset by anyone, and should instead humble himself even further.

THE DUTIES OF THE SUFIS CONCERNING THOSE IN CHARGE OF THE KHANIQAH

I—The Duties of the Sufi to the Shaikh of the Khaniqah

1. The sufi should know that it is absolutely essential for him to respect the Shaikh both inwardly and outwardly. The essence of this duty is superbly expressed in a quatrain by one of the disciples of the great sufi Master, Shah Ne'matollah Wali¹:

*Ne'mat Ali walked with us
on this path and became
a seeker in the way
Of Ne'matollah*

1. Born 731/1330 in Aleppo and died 834/1431 in Kerman.

*He made himself small and humble,
acted as an obedient son,
till from the grace of the Shaikh's Holy breath
he became Baba Ali.*

2. Without permission, a sufi should not speak in the presence of the Shaikh.
3. In the presence of the Shaikh, a dervish should be fully respectful. For example, he should not sit carelessly or impolitely stretch out his legs.
4. He should relate to the Shaikh in private those of his visions, dreams, or spiritual experiences which he feels are worthy of notice.
5. In kissing the Shaikh's hand, he should do so with the intention of absorbing in his heart the grace which emanates from him.
6. He should not object, or take exception, to any of the Shaikh's actions.
7. The dervish's welfare depends upon obeying all of the Shaikh's orders. In doing so, he must neither make excuses nor be negligent:

*When the Pathmaster of your love orders wine,
Drink, and await the mercy of God.*

Hafez

8. A dervish must never try to test the Shaikh.

II—The Duties of a Dervish to the Pir-e Dalil

1. He should obey the *Pir-e dalil's* order with all his heart and soul.
2. After the Shaikh, he should observe respect for the *Pir-e dalil* in the sufi gathering.
3. By consulting the *Pir-e dalil*, he may resolve his spiritual difficulties.

4. The dervishes should refer all seekers wishing to be initiated to the *Pir-e dalil*.

5. A sufi may consult the *Pir-e dalil* concerning his worldly, financial, or emotional problems, but should not expect any material help from him in return.

III—The Dervish's Duties to the Tea-Master (Doudeh-Dar)

1. He should be as kind as possible to the *Doudeh-dar*.
2. The dervish has no right whatever to give orders to the Tea-master. If there is anything he needs, he may politely request it of him.
3. The sufi must respect the *Doudeh-dar* (after the Shaikh and the *Pir-e dalil*), knowing that he is more advanced on the Path than himself.

IV—The Duties of a Dervish to his Fellow Dervishes

1. He should show respect to those dervishes who were initiated before him. Also, they should be seated in a prior position to him in the assembly. Whoever are eldest on this path take precedence, and must be esteemed. One should not oppose or speak roughly to them, laugh loudly, or act in an unseemly manner in their presence. One must neither talk behind their backs, nor allow oneself to criticize them in any way.

Alaoddawleh Semnani (d. 736/1336) has related the following account:

A dervish was in the service of one of my friends. Whenever a negative, disdainful, or scornful feeling concerning that friend came into his heart, for a time he lost his place in my heart. Whenever he felt penitent and begged forgiveness from God, that very moment he regained his place in my heart.

Therefore, sufis must be aware that with advanced dervishes, they should never cut the thread of sincerity and love with the sword of denial and criticism. All hearts are linked, and all sufis are like a single soul. Whenever a dervish loses his place in the heart of one, he loses his place in the hearts of all. 81

2. Sufis must never speak angrily with one another, or accuse one another of behaving improperly. In their interactions, each dervish should consider himself below the other. One should know that whenever a dervish has a quarrel with another dervish, the Sufism of both is put into doubt and both will be deprived of God's grace.
3. With fellow dervishes, one should have an open heart and be empathetic and loving. Dervishes should be sincere and withhold nothing from one another, placing themselves totally at each other's disposal, until they find faith from the tree of "Truly, all believers are brothers" (*Qur'an*).
4. A dervish should never be arrogant, conceited, or act as if he were superior to others—especially because of his parentage, social position, or wealth. These trivial attachments are of no importance whatsoever in Sufism.
5. Dervishes should not give orders to their fellow dervishes. However, if there is some task which another is better suited to perform, one may kindly request that person to do it. As far as possible, each dervish should do his own work—for a dervish should never impose himself on anyone.
6. He should never withhold help from a fellow dervish; nor should he make one feel obligated to help him in return. Each dervish should instead know his own duty and carry it out willingly.
7. If a dervish is a man, he is a brother; if a dervish is a woman, she is a sister; and one has only love and devotion for one's brothers and sisters.
8. A sufi should never talk about his own inner realizations, revelations, or miraculous experiences with anyone but the Shaikh. Nor should he be conceited or arrogant with anyone because of these things.
9. A sufi should not object to the behavior of another sufi, or wonder about the "whys" and "hows" of another's actions. The

82 personal freedom of every dervish must be observed and respected in the *Khaniqah*. One should not interfere in anyone else's business, for each sufi has his own way, state, rapture, and universe.

TRAVELLING DERVISHES IN THE KHANIQAH

When travelling, it is best if a dervish observes the following rules on entering the *Khaniqah*:

1. It is not proper for a travelling dervish to enter the *Khaniqah* empty-handed. As far as he is able, he should try to bring some gift or offering along with him, even if it is only a green leaf.
2. A travelling dervish may stay up to three days in the *Khaniqah* as a guest. Any stay longer than that is dependent upon the Shaikh's permission.
3. If a travelling dervish arrives at the *Khaniqah* with his family or friends who are not dervishes, he may bring them into the *Khaniqah* only with the Shaikh's permission.
4. If it so happens that a dervish finds himself unable to reach the *Khaniqah* before sunset, it is better that he spend the night away from the *Khaniqah*, and go there the next morning.
5. During his stay at the *Khaniqah*, a dervish should not expect help from anyone. All his expenses are entirely his own responsibility. If, however, the *Khaniqah* has special funds set aside for travellers, his needs will be taken care of.
6. The traveller should have a letter of introduction with him, from either the Central *Khaniqah* where the *Qutb* resides, or from the Shaikh of his own native city. Upon arrival at the *Khaniqah* he should present this letter to the Shaikh, *Pir-e dalil*, or *Doudeh-dar*, so as to better introduce himself.
7. Any dervish residing in the *Khaniqah* for any length of time should actively devote himself to the service of the *Khaniqah*—its prosperity, welfare, and cleanliness. Before his departure, he should carefully clean out and organize his room. If he desires to make a contribution to the *Khaniqah*, he should explicitly inform the *Pir-e dalil* or the Shaikh. If they accept, then he should present it to them.

GENERAL RULES GOVERNING THE SUFI GATHERING

An assembly which is held in the presence of the *Qutb* or *Shaikh* is said to be a *sufi gathering* (*majles-e faqr*). It is obvious that any gathering which the dervishes organize by themselves without the presence or permission of either the *Qutb* or a *Shaikh* cannot be called a genuine *sufi gathering*.

The following rules of behavior should be observed by all dervishes in the *sufi gathering*:

1. While sitting, full *adab* should be observed. It is preferable for a dervish to sit in the kneeling position (with his legs under him) placing the palm of his right hand on the left thigh. The palm of the left hand should grasp the wrist of the right hand. If he cannot sit like this, he may sit crosslegged with the hands arranged in the same way described above. Both of these positions serve to emphasize the negation of the *sufi's* sense of "I-ness", and manifest his nothingness. If one finds it impossible to sit in either of these two positions, then one should leave the gathering. (In a gathering where the *Qutb* is not present, the *Shaikh* is allowed to sit in the special position of "deep contemplation". The other dervishes are not permitted to do this here however.)
2. The *sufis* should not lean against anything while sitting.
3. They must not be attentive to anything, but rather must be totally absorbed in the heart-remembrance of God:

*One can never get enough
of the ecstasy of seeing you,
just as one can never remain sober
in the Circle of your drunkards.*

Majzoob-e Tabrizi

84 4. The dervishes should not speak with each other. Without the Shaikh's permission, they should not even begin to speak.

5. They should refrain from smoking.

6. In the gathering, each sufi is seated according to his years of experience on the Path. Those eldest on the Path sit closest to the Shaikh. Family, wealth, or social position are to be considered of no importance in this assembly.

FORMALITIES OF THE SOFREH¹

In laying down, spreading out, and removing of the *sofreh*, the following formalities should be observed:

1. The *Pir-e dalil*, with the permission of the Shaikh, orders the laying out of the *sofreh*. The dervishes of service are responsible for this.
2. Taking the *sofreh* in their hands, the dervishes of service kiss the ground reverently before the Shaikh, and then spread out the *sofreh* before him.
3. The first thing that is placed on the *sofreh* is salt, then bread, and then the rest of the meal.
4. When the meal begins, the others should not commence eating until the Shaikh has begun.
5. At the commencement of the meal, all sufis eat a bit of salt, saying, "*Bismillah-i-Rahman-i-Raheem*" ("In the name of God, the most Compassionate and Merciful"), and then begin eating.
6. At the conclusion of the meal, the Shaikh does not stop eating until everyone else has completely ceased. When the meal is over, each person eats a bit of salt. The Shaikh must precede everyone in this action, declaring, "*Alhamdu Lillahay Rab-beel Alameen*" ("All praise is God's, the Lord of all the Worlds"). Then he offers a prayer.
7. No one should leave the *sofreh* until the Shaikh's prayer is over.
8. The collecting and spreading out of the *sofreh* is the responsibility

1. *sofreh*: a cloth spread out on the floor for meals.

of the dervishes of service. Without permission, no sufi has any right 85 to help them.

9. The *sofreh* should be collected in such a manner that the dervishes finish folding it up before the feet of the Shaikh. When taking the *sofreh* out from the Assembly, they kiss the ground in reverence before the Shaikh.

THE STEWARDS OF THE KHANIQAH

The stewards (*nozzar*) of the *Khaniqah* are selected from those advanced dervishes who have at least twelve years experience in Sufism. The Shaikh appoints three, five, or seven stewards of the *Khaniqah*, while keeping in mind the length of their experience in Sufism, their spiritual development and behavior. The number of stewards varies according to local conditions and area.

The duties of the stewards of the *Khaniqah* are as follows:

1. The stewards secure the financial needs of the *Khaniqah* from the sufis, who are individually responsible to determine the sum they wish to give.
2. The expenses entailed in holding the Thursday and Sunday night meetings in the *Khaniqah* are under the supervision of the stewards. The procedure to be followed in meeting the necessary expenses depends upon the situation and income of that particular *Khaniqah*. This procedure is determined and dictated by the *Pir-e dalil*.
3. The stewards prepare and organize the mourning ceremonies and festivals of the *Khaniqah* while supervised by the *Pir-e dalil*.
4. The stewards take care of the *Khaniqah*'s building, its repairs, and all its daily expenses according to the orders of the *Pir-e dalil*.
5. They organize the financial accounts of the *Khaniqah* and the upkeep of its facilities.
6. The stewards help out in the building of any new *Khaniqahs*, and volunteer their aid to those already built.

Sufis should be open and friendly to members of all religions and nations:

*Like compasses we are; one foot stable in Islam
The other voyaging through all religions.*

Sa'di

The purpose of our reminder here is to say that *it would be unfortunate for a lover to turn his thoughts to anything but the Beloved.*

صوفی گیست؟

ANSWERS
TO
QUESTIONS
ABOUT
SUFISM

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, many American and European young people have come to express an interest in Eastern culture and thought. This spirit of inquiry has led many to the study of Sufism. With increasing frequency, for example, I have been receiving letters from dervishes and others interested in Sufism containing questions about Islamic mysticism and the way to the Truth. Since the questions posed in these letters are profoundly interrelated, I have grouped them topically in this essay in order to provide answers that may offer some insight into the method of Sufism.

Clearly, anyone desiring a deeper knowledge of theoretical mysticism should refer to the prose and poetry of the classical sufis. If God wishes, such people will eventually become seekers on the path of Truth—through practical Sufism. May God's grace be upon their seeking.

IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE OMNISCIENT

1—THE SUFI PATH

Citizens of every nation and believers of every religion follow their various paths with the aim of getting somewhere, gaining something, or becoming someone. The sufi path, however, leads to non-being, loss of self, and passing away in the Beloved. As Khwajeh 'Abdollah Ansari has said:

*O God! Non-being is an affliction for all,
but a blessing for me.*

Thus, whoever enters the path of Love in order to achieve a spiritual station or “high state of consciousness” has taken the first step wrongly. Rumi, the great Persian poet and sufi, has told the following story in this regard:

Once, a lover came to his Beloved’s house. He knocked on the door. “Who is there?” the Beloved asked. The man answered, “It is I, your lover.” “Go away,” said the Beloved, “for you are not really in Love.” Years passed, and again the lover came to the door of the Beloved’s house and knocked. “Who is there?” asked the Beloved. This time the man answered, “It is you.” “Now that you are I,” replied the Beloved, “you may come in.”

In other words, the sufi is one who goes on the path in order to not ‘be’.

2—TRAVELS OF THE SUFI

Everyday people travel from here to there concerned with worldly matters. Ascetics reject this world and look towards paradise, striving to journey to the world hereafter. Sufis, however, abandon travel altogether and let go of themselves in search of God:

*I abandoned travelling and lived
with the Beloved. What bliss,
O God, have I received from
this kind of travelling!*

Rumi

The gnostic (*aref*) travels within himself, whereas the sufi travels *from* himself. The gnostic says, "Know thyself, in order to know God." The sufi says, "Let go of yourself, in order to be free." People of the world journey in the realm of existence; the sufi journeys in the realm of non-being. Those in the material world are forever in a mad rush, never at rest. Sufis, however, are content with their present state, whatever it is. They are serene and at peace. *Thus, the sufi travels from himself towards God.*

3—THE SUFI'S OCCUPATION

The sufi spends all of his energy in the way of the Beloved. He knows that his energy used in any other way is wasted. For this reason, the sufi's work is creative and serves society. In addition, the sufi at work is thankful for whatever God provides. He carries out his responsibilities effectively and sincerely, with the highest possible efficiency, because he seeks God's satisfaction and not his own.

In view of this, most sufi masters have engaged in a life occupation. On the sufi path, he who does not work and exists as a parasite, living off society, cannot be a true worshipper of God. As Mohammed, the Prophet of God, has said:

*Whoever does not have work
does not have religion.*

Thus, the person without work is not a sufi.

4—THE SERVICE OF THE SUFI

Since the sufi is in love with God, he seeks to serve Him with complete sincerity. The best way to serve God is to serve people. In

order to re-affirm his devotion to God, the sufi endeavors wholeheartedly to serve all people. Moreover, he does so with no expectation of spiritual or material reward. He considers being able to serve as a blessing from God, and thus he renders service to everyone humbly, with all his heart and soul. As Sa'di has said:

*Worshipping God is not done with
rosary beads, prayer carpet or robe.
Worshipping God is serving people.*

Some sufis, in the way of selfless devotion, have chosen arduous careers, in order to perform service to society. Other sufis have sought to make friends with people of aggressive or distasteful dispositions, enduring without complaint the rigors of such an association. By guiding and uplifting these people, the sufi relieves society of their bad behavior and averts any harm they might inflict. Still other sufis have chosen ugly or deformed people as partners in marriage, so as to better serve these people. *Thus, the sufi is a servant of all humanity.*

5—THE SUFI'S REMEMBRANCE OF GOD (ZEKR)

The sufi is a lover of God. Like one who is enraptured in human love, always thinking of his or her lover, the sufi's heart—ravished by Divine Love—is continually immersed in remembrance of the Divine Beloved:

*Don't be inattentive to the Beloved,
not even for the blink of an eye;
For perhaps in that moment She'll look
and you'll have missed Her.*

Indeed, the *zekr* is like a broom that with the aid of the Master sweeps everything but God from the heart of the sufi—to the extent that even the dust of one's very being is swept away. Then the sufi proclaims:

*I thought of You so often
that I completely became You.
Little by little You drew near,
and slowly but slowly I passed away.*

Thus, the sufi is in constant remembrance of God.

6—THE SUFI'S PRAYER

People pray in order to draw God's compassion and grace upon themselves. In their prayers, they beg God to bestow His benevolence upon them and not His wrath. But the sufi is one who is in love with the Beloved. Whether the Beloved is clothed in the garb of benevolence or wrath makes no difference to him. How, then, can the sufi pray for anything, when all he sees is the Beloved and not the outer garment?

One who prays to God for something prays from a 'self'. Such beseeching becomes a manifestation of an individual consciousness before the Absolute Existence. However, the enraptured lover cannot at all be conscious of his own existence before the Absolute, as that would be infidelity to the Beloved. Bayazid has said:

*From the time of my initiation into Love,
I have been ashamed to ask anything from
God,
but God himself.
Even to my daily prayers, required by religion,
I added, "O God, you know what Bayazid
wants!"*

In the words of Rumi:

*I know a group of saints;
'their' mouths are shut to prayer.*

Since the sufi wants only what God wants, and has no 'self' from which to pray, how can he pray for anything? Indeed, how can 'he' pray at all? *Thus, when the sufi prays, 'he' is not praying and consequently cannot pray for anything.*

7—THE REPENTANCE OF THE SUFI

Everyday people repent from their past misdeeds. Ascetics renounce the world as a whole. The sufi, however, gives up both this world and the next. Everyday people repent in the hope of a better future; ascetics repent for the promise of heaven. But the sufi, in God's Love, lets go of everything.

In feeling repentent for their past misdeeds, people have themselves in mind. Since the sufi is nobody, no-self, there can be no repentance for him. In other words, as the expression of repentance is a sign of 'self'-existence and the sufi in Love has given up this 'self', he even 'repents from repentance' or 'lets go of letting go'. Concerning this, the Prophet has said:

*Your very being and existence
is a sin which is like no other sin.*

It is reported that Hallaj once asked Ebrahim-e Khavass what spiritual station he had reached. Ebrahim replied, "I am in the station of complete trust in God (*tavakkol*)."¹ Hallaj exclaimed in sorrow, "O lose yourself. Then there'll be no need to trust in God."² *Thus, in and through God's Love the sufi lets go of everything, even his letting go.*

8—THE ASCETICISM OF THE SUFI

The ascetic turns away from this world toward the world hereafter. The sufi turns away from both this world and the next, inclining toward God alone. In turning away from the pleasures of this world, the ascetic desires to gain the pleasures of heaven. The sufi, however, enraptured in Divine Love, passes from himself and forgets entirely about gain, loss or pleasure—here or hereafter. By thinking of

and delighting in the future rewards of heaven, the ascetic is, in fact, merely engaging in a subtle form of self-gratification and self-worship. The sufi though, drunk through Union with God, is totally absorbed in the present moment, the 'here and now', and has let go of existence.

As Bayazid has said, "The duration of Bayazid's life of asceticism was only three days. On the first day, he renounced the world. On the second day, he renounced the world hereafter. And on the last day, he renounced whatever separated him from God." *In summary then, the asceticism of the sufi is renouncing and letting go of everything that is other than God.*

9—THE INWARD JOURNEY AND OUTWARD MANNER

Travelling on the path of the sufi involves both an inward journey and an outward manner.

The outward manner is a necessary part of the path because the inward journey alone cannot take one to Perfection. On the voyage towards Perfection, the sufi must master his outward manner as well as complete the inward journey, so that he lives and is in harmony with all people at all times.

The sufi, in every way, moves towards Perfection. Inwardly, he does so through being taken up by the pull of God. Outwardly, he does so by living and being in harmony with all. This proper 'outward manner' is so necessary on the path that some sufis have considered it even more important than the inward journey. For example, when Rumi was called upon to show his master (Shams-i Tabrizi) the stage of his Perfection, he refrained from speaking of his inner knowledge and spiritual insight. Instead, he declared:

*O Master of Lovers, have you ever seen
a more harmonious being than I—
alive with the living,
and dead with the dead?*

Thus, the Sufi is inwardly burning with the fire of Love, while outwardly living and being in harmony with everyone.

Although the sufi lives outwardly among people, inwardly he is constantly occupied with God. His body and mind exist with others, whereas his heart is far from them. Externally, he is congenial with everyone. Inwardly, however, he is a stranger to all. He is at peace with all people, yet within himself tranquility is to be found only in Divine Love. Though he lives among people, truly he is alone:

*Have you ever heard of a being
who is absent and present at the same time?
Such is my state, for I'm among the crowd,
while my heart has gone beyond.*

Thus, the sufi is outwardly among people, while inwardly one with God.

11—THE SELF-MORTIFICATION AND SECLUSION OF THE SUFI

Self-mortification and going into seclusion are generally not practiced on the sufi path. However, as a result of the nourishment of Love and absorption in God while in the state of 'Divine Rapture', a sufi may become unaware of his physical needs, as well as of the people around him. The rapture of Love may even draw him to such an extent that he becomes unaware of being a lover. The sufi in this state has no will of his own; therefore he may not eat, and he may become cut off from people.

In the journey towards the Truth-Reality, the sufi may sometimes mistakenly feel that as a result of his *own* efforts he moves quickly on the Path. Believing in this, he may strive intensely with his own will, thus causing the balance between his heart and soul to become upset. In order to help the sufi regain an inner harmony, the Master (or Shaikh) may seclude him from other people for a time to make certain that he rests his mind, heart, and body. When he regains his balance, he returns to society.

In this case, seclusion and ascetic practice are specific instructions given by the Master (or Shaikh) to particular individuals, based upon their needs at that time in order to regain a state of peace and serenity. For most sufis, however, such practices are not permitted. They generally have no role in Sufism. *Thus, the sufi is not one who engages in either self-mortification or self-imposed seclusion.*

12—VISIONS AND MIRACLES OF THE SUFI

In Sufism, paying attention to visions and miraculous occurrences makes one's being impure. In such an impure state, one is manifesting one's existence and thus is unable to truly perform *namaz* (daily prayers). *Namaz* is the affirmation of Divine Unity. How then can one who is attending to and thus affirming the multiplicity at the surface of the Ocean of Oneness become drowned in its depths? As Maghrebi has said:

*Don't speak to us of visions and miracles,
for we have long ago transcended such things.
We saw them all to be illusion and dreams,
and dauntlessly we passed beyond them.*

Thus, the sufi has nothing to do with visions and miracles.

13—THE PROPER MANNER OF THE SUFI

The proper manner of the sufi consists of letting go and giving up completely all self-worship, self-esteem, and attention to the 'self'. Such a way of being must first be observed and practiced in the heart of the sufi, until gradually it manifests itself in his outward behavior. To assume a humble manner in outward actions, without being truly selfless in the heart, is of no value whatsoever in Sufism. In Rumi's words:

*Among those of the heart,
outward manner exists within.*

As the Masters of the Path see through the outward manifestations of one's being to the true inner state, they are not fooled by external appearances. For example, the story is told of a disciple who was once in the presence of his Master. He was standing with total reverence and respect, like one who is praying to God. The Master said, "You are standing superbly, but it would be better if 'you' were not to be at all." All too often, as in the above story, excessive humility and self-abasement in outward manner are only indications of self-indulgence and self-conceit in one's inner being. *Thus, the proper manner of the sufi consists of selflessness in one's inner being which manifests itself in one's actions.*

14—THE STATE OF THE SUFI

When the sufi becomes surrendered to God, he truly believes that it is God who is the giver of all states. Therefore, he knows that whatever state descends upon him comes from God, and he is fully content with it.

One of the Shaikhs of Shah Ne'matollah was once in Mahan, the residence (and eventual burial place) of the Master. For a length of time, he refrained from visiting the Master. When he finally arrived, Ne'matollah asked him why he hadn't come to visit earlier. The Shaikh replied, "I was in such a negative state that I was afraid my presence would disturb the other sufis." The Master asked him to describe his state. He said, "I was depressed, dismayed, and totally disgusted with everyone and everything." Ne'matollah replied, "The destructive attribute of God was manifesting in you, and like all states, that was a good state." In other words, the Shaikh's state was that of a man dead to the world, who was being controlled by the Divine Will. So, as with every other state, his state was a gift of God. *Thus, the sufi is always in a spiritual state.*

15—THE PATIENCE OF THE SUFI

The 'self' or 'I' is affected by and reacts to the environment outside itself. The reactions which occur are expressed as anger,

annoyance, impatience, desire and so forth. The sufi, however, has nothing to do with 'I'-ness, and has no 'self' from which to react. Therefore, he is not subject to these changing emotions and has no basis upon which to become offended by anyone, nor can he offend.

A good human being controls himself and would never annoy his fellow men or inflict pain upon them, although he might occasionally experience offense in his interactions with others. The sufi, however, has neither the worldly passion to annoy or bring pain upon his fellow man, nor the basis (a self) from which to become offended. Because the sufi has no self, there is no pain for him to bear; and thus, he is unaffected by all the seeming vices and virtues of people. He who feels offended has a 'self', and he who still has a self is not a sufi. Rather, he is one who remains caught up in 'duality' and is unfaithful to God. The true sufi, however, is an ever-faithful lover of God, fully in the Oneness of God. As Hafez has said:

*We offer Love to everyone
and in Love accept all blame,
for in our way, to be offended
is faithlessness to God.*

Thus, the sufi can never experience offense.

16—THE DESIRE OF THE SUFI

The desire of the sufi is the desire of the Beloved. According to the saying of the Prophet that "Islam is surrender", the sufi becomes totally surrendered to God's Will. Therefore, he who has a desire or will of his own is not a sufi. In other words, the sufi is nothing and the Beloved is everything. As the sufi is nothing, nothing can be desired. A dervish was once asked, "What do you desire? He answered, "I desire not to desire." *Thus, the sufi is one who has no desire.*

17—THE SUFI'S RELATIONSHIP TO OTHERS

People disagree with one another and become estranged because they have differing desires and self-interests. The sufi, however, is not

concerned with achievements or gain—such as wealth, power, and social status. Therefore, he cannot disagree with or become estranged from anyone: 99

*Whoever is a stranger to wealth,
fame, and power,
he is a friend to all.*

Sa'di

That is to say, he whose heart is a stranger to all but God, is a friend to everyone, as God is all that he sees.

However, he who is conscious of himself becomes estranged from others; and the more he is concerned with himself, the more alienated from all humanity he becomes. The sufi, on the other hand, is a friend to all—being a stranger to himself. *Thus, the sufi is friendly with everyone.*

18—THE PURE HEART OF THE SUFI

Hate and spite have no place in a heart where the Love of God dwells. That is to say, a heart which is filled with malice and negativity cannot possibly contain Divine Love. Thus, free of hate, the sufi's heart contains and emanates only Love. The following story is told in this regard:

One day, Malek-e Ashtar was going to the bazaar, when someone who mistook him for his enemy came up and cursed him. After Malek had departed, people came up and asked the man if he knew whom he had just cursed. He replied, "Yes, of course that was one of my enemies." The people exclaimed, "No, you are mistaken. That was the famous sufi Malek-e Ashtar." Realizing his mistake, the man ran after Malek and found him in the Mosque doing *namaz*. After Malek had finished his prayers, he was heard to add, "O God, I hold no hate in my heart for this man. I beseech you not to make it hard for him, and ask you to forgive him for what he has done."

In a similar vein, the following story is told about 'Ali, the disciple and spiritual successor of Mohammed:

When Ebn-e Moljam struck 'Ali with the poisoned sword, he was immediately captured and brought before the Master, 'Ali, who was still alive. 'Ali said to his son Imam Hasan, "Now that he is your captive, treat him justly but with kindness."

Thus, whoever retains a grudge or has hate in his heart is not a sufi.

19—THE SUFI AND MATERIAL WEALTH

Some people believe that a sufi must be without wealth. Actually, this is an incorrect view. To willfully insist upon living in poverty is itself an attachment. The sufi, though, is free from all attachments. The essential point here is that the sufi's heart should have no attachment to wealth or worldly possessions. If a sufi is rich one day, then poor the next, he remains unaffected by either condition.

The story is told of a dervish who went to visit an honorable and wealthy Shaikh. Seeing his affluence, the dervish thought to himself, "How can Sufism and such prosperity go hand-in-hand?" After staying a few days with the Shaikh, he decided to leave. The Shaikh said, "Let me accompany you on your journey." After they had gone a short distance, the dervish noticed that he had forgotten his *Kashkul*.¹ So he asked the Shaikh for permission to return and get it. The Shaikh replied, "I departed from all my possessions, but you can't even leave behind your begging bowl. Thus, we must part company here." In this way, he taught the dervish an important lesson. *In other words, the sufi is not attached to either wealth or poverty.*

20—THE SUFI IN THE 'TAVERN OF RUIN'

In the state of 'self-having-passed-away' (*fana*), the sufi has completely lost his 'self' and reached the spiritual station which the

1. A begging-bowl or container that used to be carried by wandering dervishes, presently used as a symbol for spiritual poverty in the emblem of the Nimatullahi Order.

sufis call the 'Tavern of Ruin'. It is said that Bayazid was in this station when someone knocked at his door. Bayazid asked, "Who do you want?" The man answered that he was looking for Bayazid. Bayazid replied, "Ah! It has been years since I have had any news of him."

In such a state, the sufi has passed beyond faith and faithlessness. He sees neither friend nor stranger; and in every place and in everyone, he sees only God. Yet, it is not from himself that he sees. Rather, it is God seeing God in God. In such a state, the sufi says:

*The lover has died and left both
Islam and unbelief.
Burning in love of the flame,
the moth does not distinguish
between the light of the mosque
and the light of the monastery.*

Or:

*Blasphemy and religion, Ka'ba and
Pagan temple,
for the true lover, are one and the same.*

However, it must be stressed here than in no sense does this mean that one may neglect the performance of the duties and obligations of Islam (*shari'at*). One who refuses to follow the *shari'at* is acting out of self-will and worshipping himself. *Thus, the sufi in the 'Tavern of Ruin', having died to and passed away from himself, is liberated from both blasphemy and religion.*

21—THE DANCE OF THE SUFI

The enrapturing of the sufi by God, or rather the 'pull' of God, keeps the sufi continually in spiritual, inner dance and movement. Whenever a wave of such Divine rapture strikes the heart of the sufi, it creates turbulence in his inner being. This, in turn, causes his body

102 to move. Upon seeing such movement, non-sufis have often supposed that the sufi is dancing. In reality, however, it is the waves of the Ocean of the Truth-Reality that are tossing and turning the anchorless vessel that is the heart of the sufi.

Some superficial people have supposed that by dancing one can become divinely enraptured and reach God. While it is true that all dancing can undoubtedly give one a feeling of intoxication, this kind of dancing is willful. However, the sufi in love has no will of his own and therefore dances involuntarily. His feet dance upon both worlds, and his hands let go of all the beauty of paradise. He has given up all thought of existence. *Thus, the sufi comes into 'dance' when he has been taken from himself.*

22—THE DEATH OF THE SUFI

The sufi considers death to be a degree of Perfection. It is by means of death that one becomes closer to God. Since the sufi knows that true life is only in death, he arrives (before the death of his physical body) at the death of his 'self', through both the pull of Love and the step of inner struggle. With each breath, a quality of his 'self' dies, and an attribute of God is born, until eventually his 'self' dies away altogether. In this way, he comes alive through God and in God. This is the inner meaning of the Prophet's saying, "Die before you die", as well as of the following verse by Rumi:

*Lovers die a different death
at every moment,
and the kinds of death they die
are not just one.*

Thus, the sufi dies at every moment.

23—THE PARADISE OF THE SUFI

The sufi dwells in the paradise of being One with the Beloved in the here and now, not looking to the promised paradise of the hereafter:

*As I am in paradise now,
why should I care about the ascetic's promise
of paradise tomorrow?*

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For the sufi, he who does not find the Truth-Reality in this world will not reach it in the next. As it is written in the *Qur'an*, "Whoever is blind in this world will be blind in the next, and go yet further astray."

*Whoever does not see the face
of the Beloved today
is not likely to see it tomorrow.*

sufi poem

Thus, the sufi is in paradise in this world.

24—THE SUFI'S HAPPINESS

For most people, happiness results from the attainment of desire or the avoidance of unpleasantness. For the sufi, however, true happiness comes from giving up the 'self'. As long as you are 'you', you will be miserable and impoverished. But when your 'self' has passed away, you are the Beloved—content and fulfilled. The sufi knows that all the disturbances, anxieties, discontent and emptiness of man arise from the dichotomy of 'I'-ness and 'you'-ness (that is, from having a 'self'). For this reason, the sufi lets his 'self' die, and lives in inner peace. *Thus, for the sufi, true happiness is in giving up his 'self'.*

25—THE SUFI'S VIEW OF TIME

The sufi does not think of past or future. He is completely absorbed in the present, the 'here and now'. In this regard, the sufis have a saying that "Breath is a Godsend". Some superficial people may use such an idea to justify being lax, irresponsible and lazy. But the sufi's dependence on the present moment makes him fully grasp the significance of every breath. Thus, not even for a moment does he

104 forget his divine aim. At each moment, he is in remembrance of God, purifying himself and serving people, never postponing until tomorrow what must be done today. This is the profound meaning of the expression that “Breath is a Godsend”.

Rumi has said:

*O friend, the sufi is the child
of the moment.*

*On the path, talk of tomorrow
has no place.*

Or in the words of Shah Ne'matollah:

*Abandon these tales of yesterday
and tomorrow.*

Now is the time to change yourself!

When the sufi passes beyond the bonds of time and space, he travels from pre-eternity to post-eternity in one breath. Junaid was in such a state when he was asked about pre-eternity. He replied:

Pre-eternity is now.

There is no creation for me.

In my eyes, there is only the Creator.

Thus, the sufi knows the unique importance of this very moment.

26—SEPARATION AND UNION FOR THE SUFI

The sufi is intensely in love with God, whether God seems near or far away. Hope of being united with the Beloved, or fear of being apart, involve the banality of thinking that God will either reward one with union for one's efforts or punish one with separation for one's failings. Moreover, this attitude reduces one's relationship with God to the level of trading or bargaining. The sufi, however neither hopes for union nor fears separation. Rather, as a true lover, he expects nothing of the Beloved.

Some perfect sufis have even esteemed separation higher than union. In this view, union is but an aspiration of the lover, whereas separation is what the Beloved desires. For such sufis, a lover, in the truest sense, desires only what the Beloved desires.

Another group of sufi shaikhs have considered the agony of union to be more intense than the pain of separation. In the words of Jami:

*In union, there is the fear
of annihilation.
Whereas in separation, there is
but the hope of union.*

Thus, in the end, the sufi is concerned neither with union nor with separation, only with the Beloved.

27—THE SUFI'S VIEW OF DIVINE BENEVOLENCE AND DIVINE WRATH

The sufi sees benevolence and wrath—both qualities of God—as two sides of the same coin. As he is a lover of the ‘coin’ itself, it matters not which side shows its face. Truly, he is in love with both countenances of the Beloved.

*I love the Beloved's
benevolence and wrath.
How strange it is that I adore
these opposites!*

Rumi

He who delights in the Beloved's benevolence, but not in the Beloved's wrath is not a sufi. As Hafez has said:

*On the path, whatever happens,
whether benevolence or wrath,
is for the best.*

Thus, the sufi is equally in love with both faces of the Beloved.

Sufis are those whose hearts are filled with the love of God and who pay attention to nothing else. Although there are many sufis, truly all are one. In their spiritual lives, all have a single goal and purpose. Their hearts are all directed towards the One, and they seek nothing but the Essence of God. In the words of Rumi:

*The souls of wolves and dogs
are separate from each other.
But the souls of men of God
are all united.*

Or, as it is stated in the Sayings of the Prophet:

The believers are all as one soul.

Rumi further illustrates the point with this story:

In a court of justice requiring several witnesses to prove guilt, a prosecutor brought a few sufis to bear witness with regard to a certain crime. The judge, however, refused to accept the testimony on the grounds that the prosecutor had only one witness, a thousand sufis being the same as one.

In other words, all sufis are one.

29—THE WORLD OF THE SUFIS

There is no aggressiveness or spite in the world of the sufis. Everywhere, peace prevails and conflict has no place; hypocrisy and deceit do not exist. Each sufi seeks earnestly to serve his fellow sufis. Here, one can find only purity, tranquility and love. Truly, this is the utopia which all hearts desire; it is paradise realized in this very world.

In the realm of the sufis, all love one another—regardless of the superficial distinctions of race, wealth and social status. Under the banner of humanity, all help one another. The conflicts which so often stem from being caught up in the realm of 'I' and 'you' do not exist for the sufi. Rather, each sufi is a mirror to the other sufis and all reflect the Truth-Reality. *Thus, the world of the sufi is the world which all truly desire in their hearts.*

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30—THE SUFI AND ISLAM

The term 'Sufism' has meaning only in the context of Islam. That is to say, outside Islam, Sufism does not exist—for it is the fruit of the tree of Islam. Although one might find traces of Sufism in other religions and philosophical schools, these cannot be taken to be Sufism as a whole. The name 'sufi' is synonymous with a follower of 'Ali, himself the disciple (and spiritual successor) of the Prophet of Islam, Mohammed.

Since a sufi must be a Moslem, whoever claims to be a sufi without being a Moslem, makes a false claim. To be a sufi while not fulfilling the duties and obligations of Islam is an impossibility. With this in mind, one can distinguish those self-centered and ambitious individuals who detach Sufism from Islam and set themselves up as "sufi-masters."

One should realize that removing Sufism from Islam will result only in a pseudo-Sufism, devoid of Sufism's true essence. Such a graft onto the tree of other philosophical schools or religions can result only in a dead branch. The living fruit of Sufism, however, grows only on the tree of Islam, and only a true Moslem can receive the fragrance of its blossoms. *Thus, whatever is not of Islam is not Sufism; and whoever is not a Moslem is not a sufi.*

مراد و مرید

MASTER
AND DISCIPLE

INTRODUCTION

*Stop this cleverness and planning,
for Love closes the gates of the Divine
to the heart of anyone who does not
completely lose himself on the Path of Devotion.*

Hafez

The terms 'master' and 'disciple' have been much misunderstood in recent years, with the result that, for anyone interested in knowing about the Path, a brief clarification is very much in order. This will serve to explain the correct behavior and duties involved in this relationship and clear away certain misconceptions which may be held.

While an understanding of this relationship may be interesting for the general public, it is absolutely essential for the dervish, so that the foundation of his or her spiritual devotion will not become undermined by mistaken or foolish notions of behaving or being.

An erroneous approach may cause a disciple to undo many years of struggle on the Path, and to waste an entire lifetime without ever so

much as picking a flower from the Garden of Love and Devotion, or inhaling the fragrance of the Truth.

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For this reason, I have prepared this essay and made it available to the friends and seekers of God. May it help to serve, guide, and enlighten those who are seeking and yearning for the Truth.

THE MASTER

*There would be no movement in the stars,
nor would there be stillness in the centre of
the universe
if there were no men on earth.*

Haj Molla Hadi Sabzevari

The Master (*morad*, lit. 'the desired one') is a person who guides travellers on the path of the 'passing away of self in God' (*fana fi'llah*) and leads them towards 'eternal life through God' (*baqa bi'llah*).

He is called by different names according to varying characteristics. For example:

Shaikh— As regards the depth of the true knowledge of God which he possesses, he is one of the great sufis.

Pishva— He is the leader of seekers on the path to the Reality of the Eternal Truth.

Morshed and Hadi— He is the guide and sustainer of travellers on the Spiritual Path.

Baleq— He has realized the perfection of true maturity, the Divine Attribute of 'Being Human'.

'The Perfect Man'— He has perfectly realized all the Divine Attributes.

'Mirror which reflects the universe' and 'Goblet which reveals the world'— The master is a mirror reflecting entirely the perfect man, who is the complete manifestation of the whole of creation. He embodies the fullness of Divine Perfection, and in his face the vice-gerency of God is manifested.

'The Great Cure'— He cures those who are afflicted with

112 Divine Love, heals the wounds of those whose hearts are burned, and aids those who have lost their hearts.

'The Sublime Elixir'— He transmutes the copper of seekers' hearts into pure gold, and cleanses their being.

'Jesus'— By the breath of the Holy Spirit, he resurrects those who have died on the way of Love. He cures those whose souls are in deep pain and, when necessary, he sacrifices his life for humanity.

'Enoch', 'Elias' or 'Elijah' (Persian, *Khezr*)— He has drunk of the water of life and, until post-eternity, lives by Love. In the darkness of the way to the Truth, he lights up the lamp which shows travellers how to be.

'Solomon'— He understands the language of those who travel on the path, as did Solomon, who understood the language of the birds; and he is able to communicate with each traveller in his own language.

'Noah'— He is like a stable mountain in the midst of the storm raging on the surface of the ocean of Reality, saving voyagers from the whirlpools of destruction, and guiding them to the ark of deliverance and fulfillment.

'Elder' (Pir)— He has great experience, having tasted the warmth and coldness of the Way of Love.

'Master of the Winehouse' (Pir-e meykadeh)— He understands the intoxicated state of drunkards on the path, a state which comes from having drunk deeply from the cup of Love. He pours for each a chalice of the wine of difficulty, which he fills according to the heart's deepest desire. He guides to peace those who have become rowdy, and brings a goblet of the wine of Love to those who have not yet imbibed, giving them a taste of the ecstasy and rapture.

'Master of the Holy Fire' (Pir-e moghan)— He lights a holy flame in the hearts of novices on the Path, and knowing the secrets of hearts, he trains each person in the Spiritual Path according to his ability to understand.

'Master of the Tavern of Ruin' (Pir-e kharabat)— He knows the secrets of the Tavern of Ruin, the spiritual station of "self-having-passed-away-in-God", and sees the Light of God everywhere.

'Axis of the Universe' (Qutb)— He is a perfect man and the axis around which the world of Divine Knowledge and spiritual realization revolves.

The master is incomparably exalted. He is the object of God's constant attention, and his being is comprised of Divine Attributes. He knows the truths of Reality, and has polished the tarnish of multiplicity from the mirror of his heart. He has journeyed to the end of the way of spiritual poverty and abandonment of self. He is the guide of the Spiritual Path and the sun of the Truth.

He is the Noah of the ark of the voyagers of purity, and the basis of illumination and revelation for those who are faithfully carried away by the wind.

He takes the hands of stragglers who have fallen behind and leads them onwards, while he enables those who are well advanced to arrive at the Truth.

He liberates the traveller from the dark night of self-worship, and brings him into the brilliance of that clear daylight, which is in this world the paradise of the selfless witnessing of the Divine Truth.

*I am a disciple of the Master of the Holy Fire.
O preacher, do not be displeased with me.
As he has fulfilled in this world,
what you but promised in the next.*

Hafez

The attention of the master is an elixer which transmutes the copper hearts of travellers to gold and delivers them from the brink of disaster. He burns away the lover's existence, and illuminates him by the light of the Beloved.

*By a glance we transform dust into gold
and by a flash from the corner of one eye,
we cure a hundred pains.*

Shah Ne'matollah Wali

*No matter what part of the world
the masters are from,
in soul and body,
they are of the Prophet's line.
It matters not where a rose grows.
It is still a rose.
Wherever a vat of grapes ferments,
there is wine.
If the sun rises in the west,
it is still the sun.
Whatever the master possesses,
whether worldly goods or spiritual qualities,
is entrusted to his successor.
That is why in every era
a master arises,
and this divine experiment
continues until the end of time.*

Rumi

Though totally and utterly needy, the master lacks nothing. Far from the world of illusion, he is one with the Absolute Truth.

*Though solitary and alone,
The Master is a king,
whose armies and servants
are his spiritual intent and all-consuming love.*

Rumi

1. Each master receives the robe of his predecessor, which is the sign of his assuming the responsibility of being a master. Whoever receives this robe resides at the very threshold of God.

*Those who know the soul are freed
from the bonds of multiplicity.
For they have been drowned
in the dimensionless Ocean of Oneness.*

*In the heart of grapes
they see wine.
In the passing away of all,
they see the world as it really is.
Though in appearance they are human,
in essence they are Gabriel, the Holy Spirit,
freed from anger and desire
and the nonsense of words.*

Rumi

THE MASTER FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THE *QUR'AN*

It is necessary to bear in mind that the banquet of Love is not suitable for everyone; such a blessing is not given to those who are ensnared in the desires of self.

God gave one of his enlightened slaves the rank of master, and sent Moses to be his disciple. As regards the master, God has said, “ . . . a slave of My slaves, I have given him Divine Mercy from nearness to Me, and have taught him Divine Knowledge directly from Me.” (*Qur'an*)

Here, in this *Qur'anic* verse, God clarifies the five qualities of a spiritual master. The first quality is termed that of being a chosen slave and arises from the reference, “ . . . a slave of My slaves . . . ” Such a chosen slave of God is one who is freed from the delusion that there could be anything other than God.

*The beggar at Your door
does not need the eight gardens of Paradise.
The prisoner of Your Love
is freed from this world and the next.*

Hafez

The second quality of mastery arises from the ability to perceive the realities of being, directly from the Reality. This is expressed by the phrase, “ . . . I have given him Divine Mercy . . . ” No one is worthy of such a spiritual station unless completely freed from the layers and layers of veils that form the differentiations of Absolute Reality into the relative levels of being (that is, the spiritual planes and the material world). For until one is freed from veils, everything that emanates from behind the veils will appear with the veil as an intermediary reflection, and will be distorted accordingly, taking on the characteristics of that particular veil, or plane of being.

The third quality of mastery concerns the Grace of nearness to God, and is expressed by the phrase, “ . . . Mercy from nearness to Me . . . ” The results of this Mercy comprise the illumination of the Divine Attributes, the effacement of all human qualities, and the acquisition of divine ways of being.

The fourth quality of mastery results from the honor of receiving Divine Wisdom from the realm of the Absolute Reality, as expressed in the phrase, “ . . . and I have taught him . . . ” Unless the tablet of the heart becomes cleansed of the forms and images of relative knowledge, it will not be able to accept the inscription of the Truth; in other words, the disciple will not be ready to receive Divine Knowledge.

The fifth quality of mastery consists of an awareness of Divine Knowledge that is received directly from God, without any intermediary, and is expressed in the phrase, “ . . . Divine Knowledge directly from Me . . . ”

Therefore, if a man really is a master, his being must include the five qualities described above:

*Not every illumined face
knows how to be a beloved one.*

*know how to look into them as Alexander did
and therein see the universe reflected.¹*

*Not everyone who puts on a crown
and sits upon a throne
knows how to be a real king.*

*Here are thousands of fine points
that are narrower than a single slender hair.*

*Not all who shave their heads
and enter on the path
are free from this world's bonds,
as are the qalandars.²*

Hafez

THE DISCIPLE

*Take a step towards Love,
for on this journey,
there is much to be gained.*

Devotion comes from a ray of light emanating from the Attribute of God termed, “being devoted”. Unless God illuminates this Attribute in the slave, unless the reflection of the light of devotion appears in his heart, he will not become a devotee. In the *Qur'an*, God says, “O Prophet, you do not guide those whom you love; it is God who guides those whom He wills, and He knows best those who receive guidance.”

*Indeed, if it is not God's will,
how can one enjoy the fruits of God?*

1. Alexander the Great was said to possess a mirror which showed him the whole universe.

2. Qalandars are sufis who have given up all their attachments and shave their heads as a symbol of spiritual rebirth.

The disciple is a lover whose heart is languishing and weary. He is one who has passed beyond both worlds, and has become united with the Truth-Reality. He seeks God alone, and in his words there is only talk of God. He approaches the Beloved and is ensnared by Love. He continually purifies the mirror of his heart from the tarnish of 'self', and through the Grace of God, it shines brilliantly.

The disciple is a sincere seeker who is freed from all attachments. He longs for God as he passes from his 'self'; and he takes to the Path not speaking of himself. He has no tale to tell about his 'I'; he can never complain about the Beloved.

*This kingdom of longing
is not given to just anyone,
nor is this ocean of sadness
entrusted to all hearts and souls.
Those who wish to be healed
are deprived of this gift of torment;
as it is not entrusted
to those who seek a cure.*

Abu-Osman Hairi has said, "The disciple is he whose heart has died to everything except God. He longs only for God, and for nearness to God. In the rapture and intensity of divine love and passion, the desires of his 'self' vanish from his heart."

*In an orgy where a thousand souls are sacrificed,
there is no place for itinerant drummers.*

Shaikh Abu-'Abdollah Khafif has said, "Devotion draws the heart to the Beloved. Its essence is continual effort and abandonment of ease."

*You must leave yourself.
You must pass from body and soul.
With each step a thousand bonds appear.
Thus, a swift, bond-breaking traveller is required.*

Abu-'Ali Rudbari has said, "The disciple wishes for himself only that which God desires. The master wants nothing from both worlds except God. Thus, the disciple surrenders himself and is content with whatever the Beloved wishes."

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THE NECESSITY OF HAVING A MASTER

*In Love's domain, do not take
one step without a guide.
For on this road, he who has no guide
loses the way.*

Hafez

*Create an elixir from a handful of dust
and kiss the doorstep of a perfect man.*

Rumi

After the seed of the blessing of devotion has fallen into the fertile soil of the heart by the Grace of God, one must not let it wither. Rather one must place it in the care of a perfect master whose dominion is the entire universe.

In this way, it is protected from the many ways in which it can be destroyed. This enables the seed to mature and bear fruit in accordance with its innate ability. It is in reference to this that the following *Qur'anic* verse was revealed, "O Prophet, guide those who seek the straight path."

*The reason why you are so dead and withered
is that you have abandoned the master.
In the ocean of the soul, it is impossible to swim.
Here the only salvation is Noah's Ark.
And so, the king of the Prophets declared:*

*"I am the Ark in this infinite Ocean,
as are those who truly are my successors,
who truly have my divine vision.
Together we are Noah's Ark in the Ocean.
So do not turn away from this ship!"*

Rumi

If one comes to a master, and one's self-worshipping self begins to criticize and make excuses, such as, "Is this master perfect or not?", one should remember that "even if a lowly slave speaks, listen carefully and obey." One must bear in mind that it is better to be possessed by a lowly slave, than by one's own self.

*Do not say that the Beloved has left
and the City of Love is empty.
The world is full of perfect masters,
but where are the sincere disciples?*

Kamal Khojandi

Moses, although he was a prophet, served as a disciple. As Hafez wrote, "Moses found the Beloved after he had served sincerely for a few years." Then, having gained the spiritual riches of prophethood, he was graced as is described in the following verse:

"I wrote on the tablets, counsel sufficient for all matters and an explanation of everything." (*Qur'an*)

With humility, Moses asked his master, *Khezr*: "May I follow you so that you can teach me whatever you have learned about arriving at the Reality?"

The answer he received was, "You will never be able to be sufficiently patient with me." (*Qur'an*).

The shaikhs of the Path have declared the following about the necessity of having a master, "He who has no spiritual master has no religion."

*If you do not have a lock of
the Beloved's tresses in your hand,*

*you are less than a Zoroastrian slave,
as you do not even have his belt of faith.*

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Sohbat-e Lari

In addition to what has been said above, there are other reasons why it is necessary for a seeker and traveller on the Path to have a master:

1. It is not possible for a man to arrive at the *Ka'aba*¹ of this world without a guide. It is clear therefore, that in order to undertake the pilgrimage to the true inner *Ka'aba* of the heart, it is necessary to have a perfect guide, a master who is united with the Beloved.

*If you had been without a guide
on that path which you
have travelled many times,
you would have lost your way.
So beware, do not spurn a guide!
Do not venture alone on the road
which you have not yet seen.*

Rumi

Imam J'afar Sadeq has said, “One who journeys far from the city seeks a guide. You, who are even more ignorant of the celestial than of the terrestrial path, must seek a guide for yourself.”

2. As there are many obstacles and traps on the Path, the road is extremely dangerous without the Divine Grace of a master.

*Do not travel through these stations
without the company of a perfect master.
There is darkness. Beware of the danger
of getting lost!*

Hafez

1. The *Ka'aba* is the first building constructed for the worship of God, having been built by Abraham at Mecca. Each year thousands of pilgrims walk around it, symbolizing the return of all believers to God.

122 3. The seeker will encounter many trials and difficulties while travelling along the Path. It is only by the grace of an enlightened master that he will be able to pass through them.

Deadly poison looks like honey and milk.

Wait! Do not journey without a master who knows.

Rumi

4. There are many hazards, doubts, and mistakes made on this journey, so it needs to be made with the help of a master. One can only be liberated from the deceptions of the self by the grace of a perfect guide, who is truly a place of refuge.

*Choose a master, for without one
the road on this journey is
full of hazards, fear and danger.*

*If the shadow of the master is not near,
you will be terrified
by the shrieks of ghouls.*

Rumi

5. In order to become free from the disease of 'self', the sufi needs a spiritual doctor. In this way, by the grace of the master's holy spirit, the sufi's sickness is treated, and his pains are cured.

*Screaming, wailing, 'I am sick'.
How long will you continue to consult
those who are ill themselves?
Seek a doctor who is healthy,
as he can provide a cure
for all the illnesses of the world.*

6. A spiritual state may come upon the traveller which liberates him from the cloak of being human and the garments of water and earth.

A danger at this point is that the traveller may fall into pride, and imagine that God has descended into *him*, and that God has united with *him*. In such a case, a clear-sighted shaikh and capable master is necessary to bring him out of this illusion by spiritual means. If this does not happen, his condition of being lost and off the Path can be disastrous.

*Imagine that I am wiser than Plato
and that I know by heart the sacred books
of all nations.*

*I am unfaithful unless I have learned
the secrets of spiritual intimacy
from the master of the Path.*

Sohbat-e Lari

7. For those who are truly travelling on the Spiritual Path, witnessings occur. Some of these indicate spiritual progress, while others show imperfections.

The master must be informed of these witnessings in order to interpret them properly to the disciple. If the witnessing is truly an indication of spiritual progress, it can be a reason for encouraging the disciple. But if the witnessing indicates imperfection, the master informs the disciple of this, so that the disciple can try to remove it. As those who are of the unseen world know the language of the invisible world, they can truly interpret these secrets of intimacy.

8. Only by the grace, attention, and training of the master will the self-seeing and self-serving of the traveller pass away.

*Only the master's shadow of Love
kills the self.
Do not let go of your devotion
to him who kills the self.*

Rumi

When the possessor of divine riches accedes to the throne of guidance and dominion, and rises in order to guide seekers, he of necessity fulfills the responsibilities of a master, and observes the way and manners of a beloved one.

Briefly, the master's responsibilities are the following:

1. The master must be one who knows the laws and doctrine of Islam sufficiently well so that if a disciple needs to be instructed in such knowledge, he can teach him, or else refer him to one who is better versed in such matters.
2. The master must be one who has an occupation, so he can encourage the disciple also to have one.
3. To the extent that he is able to do so, the master must be one who meets the financial needs of the disciple, in order to enable him to undertake the journey to the Truth-Reality.
4. The master must not be one who is concerned about people's adverse criticism, so that he can protect the disciple from envious and malevolent tongues.

We are not influenced by anyone.

*As the hearts of those
who have left the world
are set free.*

Hafez

5. The master must not be too involved in worldly affairs. And he must also not be concerned with the disciple's wealth, as such behavior can quite easily ruin the beginner's spiritual state of devotion, and result in him becoming critical. This is essential, because a disciple tends to get lost in the questioning and criticism at the beginning, and there is no greater disaster for a disciple than that of criticising the states and behavior of the master.

*I am a slave of him who is free
from all possible attachments in the universe.*

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Hafez

6. The master must be one who is compassionate with the disciple. He must not give him work beyond his capacity, and must prepare him for the Path gradually and with loving care.

*We are not of those who fell trees;
they are of another kind.
Although we have a hundred axes,
we do not break even one fruitless branch.*

Vahshi Bafqi

7. If the master sees that the disciple has made a mistake, he neither becomes angry nor upsets the disciple. Instead, he may admonish him in a suitable manner at the proper time. Otherwise, it is possible that the disciple will lose his devotion for the master.

*O Solomon, while you are among
both partridges and falcons,
maintain a divine forbearance,
and live peacefully with all birds.
Do not tear the feathers
from the talkative nightingale,
and keep well apart
the unharmonious falcon and crow.*

Rumi

8. If from human nature, the disciple acts in an unsuitable manner, the master must be able to overlook such misbehavior.

*See the kind nature of the tavern master.
To his loving eyes,
everything we rowdy drunkards do
is beautiful.*

Hafez

9. The master must not be one who is quick-tempered, because the disciple learns from him to develop a pleasant disposition. As it is said, “The disciple’s inner self is a mirror of the master’s actions and manners.”

10. The master is one who places his disciple’s welfare before his own, ensuring his disciple’s peace and tranquility. He must always keep in mind the following verse from the *Qur'an*:

“They prefer the welfare of the refugees to their own, though they themselves are needy.”

11. The master is one whose trust in God is such that he does not become anxious over the providing of his disciple’s sustenance.

*When we arrayed ourselves with resolution,
we needed a helmet of divine intention
and a coat of mail
formed of trust in God.*

Majzoob-e Tabrizi

12. The master must be one who receives the rays of divine wealth and sainthood, so that he can transmit them to the disciple. This also enables him to guide worthy travellers and teach them the remembrances of the Truth-Reality.

13. The master must be one who is neither gladdened by an increase of disciples, nor saddened by their decrease. He knows that each disciple who unites himself to the master has been brought by the Truth-Reality and has come to serve this Reality. Similarly, he knows that each disciple who leaves is taken away by this same Reality.

and false knowledge,

cries out when his listeners leave.

*He seeks knowledge for procuring students,
not for being liberated from this world.*

*The master has passed from these
worthless buyers.*

*As a handful of dust can buy nothing,
his only customer is God. He draws the master up
and buys the souls of the true believers.*

Rumi

14. The master must be one who does not spare any effort in training his disciples. Whether they accept or reject his teaching, whether they realize the Truth or die without it, he is satisfied and not critical of what has been decreed from pre- eternity.

15. The master must be one who in his daily life with the disciple is always dignified and worthy of respect. Nothing in his manner should provide occasion for the disciple to become rude or flippant. Flippancy on the part of the disciple weakens his devotion to the master, and leads him away from the Path.

16. The master must be one who does not advance his disciple too quickly on the Path. Instead, he brings him along slowly so that the disciple does not fall away from the Path because he has been pushed too hard.

17. The master must be one who keeps his word with the disciple, even when the disciple is not constant in his service or devotion. He neither neglects his duties towards the disciple, nor withdraws his grace with every mistake the disciple makes.

18. The master must be one who has an august presence. This inspires respect in the disciple's heart, and brings about the proper manner of dervishes in his actions. The master's majesty and saintliness break down the disciple's 'self', so that peace enters his

128 heart. The Satan of 'self'-consciousness loses all power in the presence of such saintliness.

19. The master must be one who sees both millionaires and beggars in the same light. In his presence, social position, high birth and wealth are of no importance. Thus, the ground of devotion is kept fertile for each disciple, regardless of his standing in the material world.

THE DISCIPLE'S DUTIES TO THE MASTER

When a sick man recognizes his doctor, or when a disciple has found his master and begun to lose his 'self' in the way of Love, he must become familiar with the appropriate behavior and responsibilities. Thus, he will be able to satisfy the master and come into harmony with the will of God, having overcome a major obstacle on the Path.

If he cannot undertake his responsibilities with respect to his master, he will surely not be able to do so for God. As the sufis have said, "One who spoils his relationship with the lord who is near him, will not be able to reach the Lord on high."

*The master is a lion
and hunting is his work,
while the rest of creation
are but scavengers.
As long as you are able,
try your best to satisfy the master.
Then he will be strong and active
in his hunting.*

Rumi

The disciple's responsibilities are many and varied. Below are listed some of these duties and the ways in which they must be performed:

1. The disciple must be sincere in intention and pure in faith. He must realize that the master is a divine physician who merely from the disciple's appearance can perceive the hidden diseases of his heart and faith. As it is recorded in the sayings of the Prophet, "They are those who spy upon hearts, therefore be sincere while sitting with them." In other words, they have access to men's hearts and know their innermost secrets.

*The master who sees by the light of God
is aware of the beginning and the end.*

*He is like a thought
that comes into the heart,
and therein, the secret
of one's state is revealed to him.
He who travels throughout the Universe,
has no difficulty
in walking upon the earth.*

2. The disciple must take only the master as his guide, because if he imagines another man to be more perfect, then his relationship of Divine Love and spiritual intimacy with the master will be weakened, and the master's words and states will cease to produce their proper effects.

3. The disciple must keep the master's secrets. That is to say, when he becomes aware of a miracle, some extraordinary power, or some occurrence that the master has kept hidden, he must not divulge it.

*Those who know the Truth,
when they have drunk
from the goblet
of the true mysteries,
do not disclose it.
He who can learn the unseen secrets
can keep silent.*

130 4. The disciple must be silent in the presence of the master and not draw attention to himself. If he wishes to speak, he does so in accordance with the following *Qur'anic* verse, "O you who believe, do not speak louder than the Prophet."

*Take refuge in silence.
Since you are seeking a sign,
do not reveal yourself.
When you arrive
at the edge of the Ocean,
sit in silence.
Do not consider yourself
to be the signet in that ring.
It is a mistake for those
who can foresee the future
to proclaim such news.
That only shows
one's ignorance and imperfection.*

Rumi

5. Under no circumstances may the disciple seek precedence for himself over the master. He should keep in mind the following story:

There was a time when a crowd of people was in the presence of the Prophet. Whenever someone asked him a question, a number of people would express their opinion before the Prophet answered. The following *Qur'anic* verse was then revealed, correcting such self-serving behavior:

"O you who have kept the faith, do not precede God and the Prophet."

6. Both in his inner being and outward manner, the disciple must not criticize the master's words or actions. If the master's meaning is not immediately clear to him, he must wait patiently. If the disciple cannot understand the master's words or actions, he must attribute this to his own ignorance, and not to any imperfection in the master. Otherwise,

his devotion to the master may lessen and he may be told, “If you are following me, ask no questions until I divulge the truth of the matter.” (Qur'an)

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*When you find a master, become surrendered.
Like Moses, place yourself in the hands of Khezr.
O you who are sincere, wait patiently
for the results of his guidance.
Then Khezr will not say to you,
“Go away! Leave me!”*

*Anyone who obeys the orders of the master
is liberated from darkness, and becomes illuminated.
Be obedient, like Ishmael before Abraham,
and with joy and laughter,
give up your soul before his blade.
Listen happily, whether he speaks to you
warmly or with coldness.
Then you will be freed
from the bonds of opposites,
and the depths of hell.*

*The master's anger and kindness
are the thunderstorms and sunshine
of life's new spring.
From them, grows forth the rose
of the disciple's sincerity and purity.*

Rumi

One of Junaid's disciples once asked him a question, and then criticized the master's answer. At that point, Junaid said, “If you do not have faith in me, go away.”

7. The disciple must not try to test the master, as it is sheer ignorance to imagine that one who is imperfect can influence a perfect man.

*If a disciple tests a master
who is his leader and guide,
he is an ass.*

*O one of little faith!
If you test the master,
it is really you that is being tested.*

*Testing the master
implies a desire to affect him.
Go away! Do not seek
to influence such a king.*

*Since you do not have true discrimination,
test yourself and think not of others.*

Rumi

8. In the presence of the master, the disciple must abandon all pride, self-esteem and attempts to attract attention. He must turn towards humility, spiritual poverty, and need.

*In the presence of Joseph, the beloved,
do not flirt and display your beauty.
Do nothing but cry
and weep in supplication
like Jacob, the lover.*

Rumi

9. The disciple must place the master's peace and tranquility before his own.

10. The disciple must keep in mind the *Qur'anic* verse, "I will show my path to those who struggle towards me." He must relate this saying to his service and devotion to the master, and to the awaited arrival at the threshold of the Truth. To the fullest extent of his capabilities, the disciple must try to serve the master and surrender himself to his spiritual dominion. This involves sparing neither his possessions nor his soul. In such a manner, the disciple's fire of devotion will blaze more fiercely.

*If anyone wishes to enter your domain,
O bewitching source of my torment,
the first step is made
by sacrificing his head.*

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11. The disciple must not display his knowledge before the master, nor the results of his experience in meditation, as this is but an affirmation of self-worship and a denial of the Love of God.

12. The disciple must not speak of worldly affairs or those involved with them in the presence of the master, and thus waste his time with useless chatter. If the disciple wishes to speak, he must be discreet and sense the right moment to do so. Before speaking, he must seek from God the grace of proper behavior. Having done this, he may then begin to speak.

13. The disciple must not feel that the master is indebted to him because of his devotion. Rather, he must understand that he owes the master everything, as he receives from him spiritual expansion and nourishment, and Divine Grace. As it is said in the *Qur'anic* verse:

O Prophet, they feel that you are indebted to them, as they have surrendered (accepted Islam). Say to them, 'Do not feel that Islam is indebted to you; on the contrary, if you are sincere you will know that you are indebted to God, because he has guided you to faith.'

14. The disciple must not expect that the master will take him by the hand and raise him to the vast expanse of the Transcendental Reality of the Truth. He must be content with whatever state he is in at any given moment, understanding that he will arrive at whatever state he is capable of realizing.

15. The disciple must have a job, freeing himself from dependence on the master for his financial support. In this way, he will also not be a parasite on other people.

16. If the master expels the disciple, he should not go far away; he should persist in remaining nearby, realizing that grace is received by attending to and serving the master.

By the master's accepting and rejecting of the disciple, by testing him in a multitude of ways, the disciple is both shown to himself, and

134 known by the master. In such circumstances, many a heart has cried out, "I will either die on his threshold or reach the goal."

As an example, Abu-Osman Hairi went to Nishapur to see Abu-Hafs Haddad, and became spiritually enraptured. He wished to stay, but Abu-Hafs drove him away and told him not to come back. Abu-Osman dug a trench at the entrance to the master's house and remained there in the hope that Abu-Hafs might give him permission to re-enter. When Abu-Hafs saw the sincerity and devotion of Abu-Osman, he accepted him as his disciple, and treated him with great loving-kindness. Later, Abu-Osman became the closest companion of Abu-Hafs, married his daughter, and eventually succeeded him as master.

17. The disciple must never undertake any matter of consequence without first obtaining permission from the master. He must realize that even though his own opinion may be correct, as long as he is under the guidance of the master, he must not rely upon his own ideas for directing himself.

18. The disciple must follow the directions of the master. Although the master is tolerant, patient, and forgiving, the disciple must not take his instructions lightly, for disobedience to the master will adversely affect the disciple's progress.

19. The disciple must consult the master in regard to any witnessings he may have, whether they be visions or dreams. He must not attempt to evaluate such occurrences on his own, since their source may have been his 'self'. By himself the disciple may misjudge their validity, and misinterpret them. This could be detrimental to him. Thus, he should tell any witnessing to the master, who with true insight, will be aware of the validity of the witnessing and give its correct interpretation to the disciple.

20. The disciple must diligently listen and be wholeheartedly receptive to the words of the master. He must at all times await with eagerness whatever the master may say, for it is through the master that he receives the words of the Truth.

Because he knows with certainty that the master speaks by the inspiration of God and not by the promptings of the self's desires, the disciple constantly strives to understand the relationship between his own state and the words of the master. Gradually, he will come to feel that he has reached the threshold of the Truth-Reality, where he will obtain what is best for him according to his capacity to receive.

21. The disciple must not be too familiar either in words or actions in the presence of the master, as this can veil the Divine Majesty and cut off the outpouring of Grace. By being discreet and respectful in the master's presence, the disciple remains receptive to the Divine.

Once, a group of disciples who wished to see the Prophet gathered at the door of his house and cried, "O Mohammed, come out to us." At this point, the following *Qur'anic* verses were revealed:

Those who call you from outside your house know not what they do. It would be better that they wait patiently until you come out. God is most forgiving and compassionate.

Respect is also shown by not praying in front of the master. In addition, when the disciples pray together, or when they are gathered for the *zekr*, they must control themselves as much as possible—refraining from voluntary bodily movement and crying out. They must also never laugh loudly while in his presence.

22. When the disciple asks the master a question, it must not be one which is beyond his capacity to understand. The disciple must realize his limits, and not ask questions about matters that are beyond his spiritual state and station. He must realize that the only profitable talk for him to hear is that which is in accordance with his own understanding.

23. The disciple must tell the master his secrets, as well as all the miracles, graces and spiritual powers that God may grant him. This is essential, because concealing a secret from the master is like tying a knot in one's inner being. This knot closes the way by which spiritual expansion and help is received from the master. However, when the secret has been divulged to the master, the knot becomes untied.

24. When the disciple is talking to someone else about the master, he must speak in accordance with the listener's capacity to understand. That is, the disciple should not speak of any matter which the listener will not be able to follow. When a listener does not understand what has been said about the master, he cannot profit from what he has heard. In such a case, it is possible that the listener's idea of the master will be weakened or even completely undermined.



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IN THE TAVERN OF RUIN: SEVEN ESSAYS ON SUFISM

by Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh



The sufi is one who is a lover of the Truth, who by means of love and devotion moves toward the Truth, toward the Perfection which all are truly seeking. Having traveled the Spiritual Path (*Tariqat*), the disciple becomes a perfect being and arrives at the threshold of the Truth (*Haqiqat*).

One could liken the journey within the *Haqiqat*, within the Truth, to training in a divine university, known in Sufism as the "Tavern of Ruin". In this true center for higher education there are no professors, one's only guide being Absolute Love. Here one's only teacher is Love, one's books are Love, and one's being is Love.

Before a perfect being enters the "Tavern of Ruin", he or she can be defined. However, upon entering the Truth, such a being is indefinable, beyond the realm of words.

*Footprints but come to the Ocean's shore.
Therein, no trace remains.*

Rumi

(From "Sufism", Chapter I)

Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh is the present Master of the Nimatullahi Order of Sufis.

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